

SOME NOTABLE CONVERSIONS

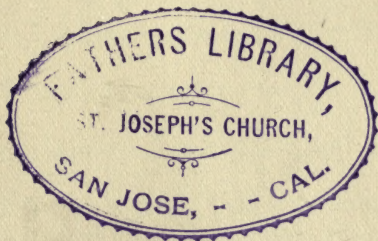


FRANCIS J. KIRK, O.S.C.

SOME NOTABLE CONVERSIONS

IN THE
COUNTY OF WEXFORD.

BY THE
REV. FRANCIS J. KIRK,
OBLATE OF ST. CHARLES.



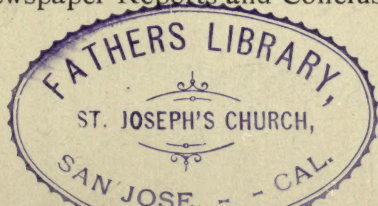
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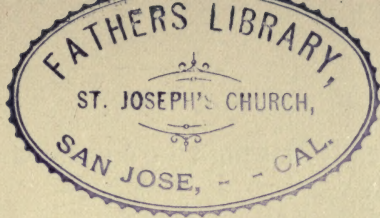
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The profits, if any, of the sale of this little book will be devoted to the erection of THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF LIGHT at Clacton-on-Sea, Essex.



INTRODUCTION.

Some forty-five years ago, the conversion of several families to the Catholic Faith caused great astonishment and indignation to the good Protestants of the county of Wexford, especially as most of the converts were among the leading families.

There was apparently no cause to account for such a movement. There were no leaders of High-Churchism among their clergy ; on the contrary, their most popular preachers were those who ranted and raved against the Catholic Church. A controversial sermon was sure to attract a crowd, which never gave itself the trouble to examine whether the statements they heard were founded on fact.

The writer of these pages was a young curate at the time, as Protestant as any of the others ; but never aggressively so, and

consequently not high in favour with his *confrères*.

The circumstances attending his own and others' conversions are so remarkable, that he has been urged many times to write a full account of his experience ; and now, in old age, when released from some more active duties, he makes the attempt, for the greater glory of God, and perhaps for the encouragement of waverers who may be still halting between two opinions. Length of years cannot dim the memory of such intensely interesting events, while letters and other documents which remain in his possession will fill up any gaps.

Some Notable Conversions in the County of Wexford.

II.—GOREY AND ITS CHURCHES.

IN the year 1850 I took my degree of B.A. at Trinity College, Dublin. My fixed intention was to receive Holy Orders. During the previous year I had attended the lectures of Archbishop Kings, Professor of Divinity; but I was obliged to remain another year for the higher studies under Dr. Elrington, Regius Professor of Divinity. The course was considered a good one, and more exacting than any that was required at the English Universities.

I received my diplomas, and now nothing more was needed but a nomination to a curacy before my ordination as a deacon could take place. I accepted the first that was offered to me. The Very Rev. Henry Newland, D.D., Dean of Ferns, and Rector of Gorey, Co. Wexford, was in need of a curate, and asked me to accept his curacy. The ordination took place at the Cathedral of St. Canice, Kilkenny. The Bishop was the Right Rev.

Dr. O'Brien, who had charge of the united Dioceses of Ossory, Ferns, and Loughlin. The cathedral is a charming old building dating from ancient Catholic times, with one of the famous old Irish towers leaning over it as if it were ready to fall.

I entered into my duties at Gorey immediately, living in furnished apartments. There was a considerable number of Protestants—more than in most Irish small towns—but, as usual in every place, divided among themselves: Church of England, Methodists, Plymouth Brethren, etc.

I must now endeavour to describe our own church as it was in my time. It was in every respect a miserable specimen of no style at all—an oblong building with large square pews, with comfortable sleeping corners; a clumsy gallery ran round three sides of the church; and there was the usual arrangement for pulpit, reading-desk, and clerk's desk all in one—commonly called the "three-decker"—effectually concealing the communion-table behind. But that did not matter much, as there was nothing on it but a shabby red cover. At evening service, when light was required, there were three iron and tin candelabras let down by ropes from the roof. As in those days snuffers were required, the clerk lowered them two or three times during the service in order to snuff the candles. In case the sermon was a little longer than usual the candles, with

their black wicks like mushrooms, scarcely emitted any light, and people had to grope their way out of the church. There was no baptismal font, and baptisms were performed with water in a common blue basin placed on the communion-table, and during the ordinary service. I endeavoured to get up a subscription for a font, but received little encouragement; one notable pious colonel promised a subscription on the express condition that it was not to be placed near the church door; so I had to give it up.

On Communion Sundays, when any of the consecrated wine remained in the chalice, several poor people were called up to partake of it, who had no intention of communicating. All that I have described has long since disappeared: in passing through the town many years after I left, I found that the old church had ceased to exist, and a very respectable building had taken its place.

The year following my ordination as deacon, I was ready to receive priest's Orders. The Bishop, not holding an Ordination that year, gave me and others letters dimissory to the Bishop of Kilmore and Elphin, to be ordained in his cathedral at Cavan. His Lordship had small consideration for poor curates. Railways were scarce in those days, and long journeys by coach were expensive. Notwithstanding,

he obliged the candidates to present themselves at Kilkenny for further examination, receiving a fee of £3, and leaving them to pay their own expenses at a hotel. Then followed the long journey from South to North, hotel charges and bishop's fee the same as before—more than enough to drain our slender purses.

During the Ordination, I experienced a very curious sensation when the Bishop, laying his hands on my head, uttered those memorable words: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." I could not refrain from whispering to myself, "I wonder if this man really believes what he is saying!" Well I knew that the body of clergy with whom I was associated, so far from claiming a power so awful and responsible, were ready at any moment to deny that they had ever received it in its plain and literal meaning. This was a little seed sown in my heart and memory which was to bear fruit afterwards.

Returning to Gorey, I was appointed surrogate of the diocese, which office imposed on me the duty of issuing marriage licenses, and this added somewhat to my income.

High-Churchism at that period had made

no progress in Ireland. The slightest approach towards it was regarded with suspicion. Dean Newland was not popular among the clergy or laity, though there was nothing in his sermons or writings calculated to wound their susceptibilities: he was only High Church in exterior, with his shovel hat, apron, and gaiters. I was unfortunate enough to adopt a double-breasted waistcoat, which was immediately branded as M.B., or the Mark of the Beast. On one occasion, being asked by a clerical friend who my tailor was, I was indiscreet enough to name a Catholic tradesman in Dublin. "Tell it not in Gath," was his only reply; which, of course, meant that it was much too dreadful to talk about.

I have mentioned that there were several different religious sects in the town. The smallest, yet most bumptious, was that of the Plymouth Brethren. I do not think they had above a dozen followers, yet they had a chapel of their own. Their chief was a well-to-do professional man with whom I had several conversations, hoping to persuade him to attend the parish church. All in vain: his fixed belief was that they alone had the full knowledge of truth; all that hoped for salvation must belong to them. I ventured to remark that Heaven would be rather empty if that were the case; his reply was

that they had the blessed assurance of our Lord: "Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a Kingdom." I could only reply: "You are, without doubt, a *very* little flock indeed. Good morning."

One other church remains to be described, the largest and most important of them all — the Roman Catholic church, dedicated to St. Michael. The architect of the church and adjoining convent was the celebrated Peter Paul Pugin. It was scarcely finished when I arrived at Gorey; often, as I passed, I envied the Papists the possession of such a beautiful group of buildings, but never ventured to inspect the interior. The land and a considerable portion of the cost of building were given by Sir Thomas Esmonde, Bart., grand-uncle of the present M.P., who bears the same name and title. He was the only Catholic gentleman who had landed property in the neighbourhood; he called to see me soon after my arrival, and we were always good friends.

About the same time a very fine bell was placed in the church tower. I heard its solemn tone three times every day—morning, noon, and evening—and was surprised that there could be so many services. On inquiry, I found that it was only the *Angelus* bell, and that people when they heard it said some prayer to themselves, no matter

where they were or what they were doing. I thought that was a very beautiful idea ; it dwelt on my mind ; and after a time I was impressed to say a prayer when I heard it, though I had not the least idea what the *Angelus* was. However, I said some little prayer to promote unity among all professing Christians. I think that I gained some special grace and light by doing so.

III.—RAMSFORT AND ITS OWNERS.

THE founder of the family was Bishop Ram, who in the reign of Queen Elizabeth was appointed first Protestant Bishop of Ferns. He and his descendants must have feathered their nest to good purpose, adding field to field until their name was to be found as owners of property in nearly every part of the county ; even in the town of Wexford, some thirty miles from their dwelling-place, one of the leading thoroughfares is still called Ram Street. The Bishop's tomb may be seen in Gorey Churchyard, with an inscription to the effect that none but those of his name and blood should be interred therein.

A legend dating from early times, and known to all, ran to the effect that the first

owner of the property who returned to the Catholic Faith would lose all his Irish possessions. The legend—alas!—has been fulfilled to the letter : a temporal loss more than compensated for by the spiritual gain. No one had the opportunity of being so intimately acquainted as myself with all the details of this remarkable history ; and no one, perhaps, is less qualified to give it proper expression.

Stephen Ram and his wife were in the prime of their life when I first saw them. Their children were quite young, and two others were born after I had come to know them. I must describe my first interview with them, which in one way was decidedly remarkable, though the circumstances were not known to me for some time after. I had been some months at Gorey before the family were expected from their house in London. I then heard that Mr. and Mrs. Ram were coming over without their children, for a few days only, to see after some arrangements before they settled down. I did not expect to receive any notice from them during their short visit, but Mr. Ram called on me at once. I supposed he was curious to see what the new curate was like ; in any case, he invited me to dine with him and his wife. Accordingly I did so, and felt much at home with them in one of their small rooms. Not for long after did I know the effect occasioned by my appearance. It

had nothing to do with personal flattery, therefore I have no hesitation in recording it. It seems that after my departure Mr. Ram asked his wife what she thought of the new curate. Her answer was : "I don't know how to express my feeling, but the first moment I looked at that young man I saw him as if the words 'Catholic Priest' were printed on his forehead."

Before resuming my personal history, I must endeavour to give some account of these dear and faithful friends, who, I believe, were instruments in the hands of God to draw me out of the narrow groove of my previous surroundings, and so fitting me to be of some service to themselves at the most critical moment of their lives.

Stephen Ram lost his father at a very early age. During his minority he was the ward of the Earl of Courtown, whose property adjoined his own. On the attainment of his majority he came into possession of a very fine estate without incumbrance. The old family mansion had been burned during the rebellion of 1798, and in consequence of the disturbed state of the country no effort was made by the family to rebuild it. They, like many others, lived in England, and were content to receive their rents from Ireland without heeding their obligations towards their poor tenants. Stephen's father was the first of his family to attempt rebuilding,

but died before the house was finished. His son was well qualified to carry on the work : his tastes were refined and artistic. Large sums of money were required to carry out his plans ; objects of ancient and modern art were collected from all parts of the Continent ; rare manuscripts and antique jewellery formed a unique private collection. Notable among these treasures was an altar rail of Siena and other precious marbles bought by him in Italy, which for more than a century had been the ornament of an Italian church. This beautiful work of art was placed by him on a terrace leading to the pleasure grounds. After remaining there several years it was purchased by a Protestant gentleman, who intended to place it in a church built in his own grounds ; but, happily, finding it much too large for the position, he sold it at a moderate price to the parish priest of Monasterevan, Co. Kildare, so that it now fulfils the purpose for which it was originally intended.

Mr. Ram was barely of age when he married, and his choice of a wife was quite in harmony with his æsthetical taste for high art in every branch. Her family name was Casamajor—Spanish in its origin, and allied in former times with the Royal family, as the name implies. Frequent intermarriages with English blood had not exhausted the original strain. In appear-

ance and temperament she was purely Spanish ; no stranger who saw her for the first time could suppose that any mixture of blood flowed in her veins. Especially when she played on her guitar and sang, she was as perfect a picture of a beautiful Spanish woman as could be imagined. Hot-blooded as she was by nature, she occasionally gave way to explosions of wrath or indignation, which generally were only aroused by acts of meanness or injustice on the part of others. Sharing all the artistic tastes of her husband, and supposing his wealth to be almost boundless, she no doubt encouraged him in his lavish expenditure. A house in London and another in Paris, together with constant travelling on the Continent, was more than enough to bring matters to a crisis ; however, no shadow of any misfortune was visible at the time I first knew them, nor for long after.

When living in London they attended the Church of St. Barnabas, Pimlico, which was the leading High Church of the day, though by no means so far advanced as the Ritualistic churches of the present day. No one, and especially no landlord, could live in peace in Ireland who was suspected of being a High Churchman ; many of the best families who were High Church in London became very low when they returned to Ireland. Not so, however, with

the Ram family : they held to their religious principles honestly, and cared little for popular opinion. They attended regularly the services at the parish church, half concealed in their large square curtained pew adjoining the communion-table. I fear some one or other may have gone to sleep during the sermon.

The morning service was sufficient for them, though they entertained a great desire to have an evening service in their own house ; and at length they obtained permission to have it, on condition that the service should be nothing more than the plain office of the Book of Common Prayer.

Preparations were made without delay. A courtyard in the centre of the house was roofed over, making a lofty, though narrow, chapel ; the fittings and decorations were designed by the owner, who had a good opportunity for exercising his artistic taste. He had furniture and pictures enough in the house without making any additional purchase. Some carved oak stalls of the twelfth century, which had been bought by him at the sale of Mr. Pugin's effects after his death, were fixed at the sides. At the end wall was hung the well-known picture by Spanielletto representing the Nativity, the group of figures including the Holy Mother ; the Angels and the Shepherds were apparently lighted up by the effulgence which issued from the Divine Infant. It

was of immense size, and reached up to the roof. On the side walls were Gobelin tapestries of the four Evangelists; and over the entrance door was a fine specimen of Lucca della Robbia ware, representing our Blessed Lady adoring her Child. The communion-table, which was never used for that purpose, was covered with embroidered silk hangings, according to the proper colour for the day. Spaces were reserved for an organ and carved oak reading-desk. Mr. Ram was the organist, and all the household were the singers. It was truly a beautiful and devotional little service. Notwithstanding, I never felt quite comfortable about the part I had to perform, though there was nothing said or done contrary to the engagement made. One day I could not help expressing my feeling to Mr. Ram, by saying that I never commenced the service without hot blood rushing to my face; I felt ashamed of my fine surplice and all the surroundings of the place, as I was really doing nothing but what he himself might have done—merely reading certain prayers and passages of Scripture. His reply was that were it not for the benefit of my absolution he might read the service himself. I was rash enough to answer, "Have you really gone to all this expense to obtain my absolution? I do not attach any importance to it myself." He was not offended,

and things went on as usual for some time longer.

The family never remained more than a few months at Ramsfort, and some years visited the place not at all. Preparations were soon made for their return to London; their town house at that time was in Grosvenor Place. I was invited to spend my holidays of that year with them. There was no doubt of their real desire that I should do so, and I readily accepted their invitation. I followed them about a month after their departure, and was warmly received. It was my first visit to London, and it would have been impossible for me to have found kinder or more intelligent guides through the mazes of this modern Babylon.

I had one peep at the Benediction in the then new church of the Jesuits in Farm Street. I thought it looked heavenly, but made no outward demonstration toward the altar. I watched to see what the two ladies who accompanied me would do. One dipped her finger in the holy water, but did not genuflect; the other genuflected, but did not touch the holy water. The former when we left the church turned to me in rather an affected manner, saying, "Don't you love *aqua sancta*?" I answered rather bluntly, "No, I don't love it at all."

Soon after, I returned to Gorey and quietly resumed my ordinary duties. Ramsfort

was left in solitude for more than a year; but that year was pregnant with consequences of vital interest to myself and many others, the account of which I reserve for my next chapter.

IV.—ROME AND ITS INFLUENCE.

THE following year—1854—I received a letter from Mr. Ram, dated from his house in Paris, inviting me to join them there, and afterwards to accompany them to Rome, where they intended to remain for some time. The eldest son, Stephen James, was now at Eton. The second boy, Edmund, was in a delicate state of health, and was to accompany his parents. I was only too glad to accept the kind offer, as I might never again have so favourable an opportunity. I obtained easily the necessary leave of absence without resigning my curacy. My mind was naturally much occupied with the details of my intended journey, and this may in a measure account for a singular dream which is worth recording, rendered all the more remarkable from the fact that I was no dreamer, and not at all inclined to attach importance to dreams of any kind.

It seemed to me that I was standing in the middle of our own unlovely church as I have already described it; no other person was present; suddenly the church took fire, and I was surrounded with the flames. Yet they seemed to have no power to hurt me; I stood calmly looking at their progress. After a time the fire and dense smoke gradually subsided, and to my astonishment I perceived new walls, as it were, rising out of the smoke, altogether different from the form of the old ones. At length the air cleared completely, and I found myself still standing on the same spot, but in a building quite unlike anything I had ever seen. It was evidently a church; but the style of architecture was entirely new to me, and very beautiful. The form was nearly a square. The walls were of various coloured marbles. The sanctuary was not in any way like pictures of foreign churches with which I was familiar. The altar, instead of being only slightly raised above the level, was elevated apparently half-way between the ground and roof; the marble steps leading to it from the nave were arranged at each side, while another flight of steps in front descended to a large crypt underneath the high altar. At the back of the altar was an open space all round the apse, where I also perceived an organ.

The dream made a decided impression on

my mind, but I did not perceive that it led to anything in particular. It was not long, however, before the memory of it was revived in a very peculiar manner; the explanation of which will come in due course.

After spending a few very pleasant days in Paris, we were ready to start on our journey. Travelling in those days was not so easy or expeditious as at present. Our first object was to reach Marseilles. The railway at that time was only finished as far as Lyons, where we halted for a day or two, visiting all places of interest, especially the churches and monasteries. Mr. Ram knew the history of all the great monasteries, and so was an admirable *cicerone*. Though not the least inclined to be a Catholic, he delighted in hearing the monks chanting their Office, and was quite up in the history of their respective Orders. He was glad to have me to talk to, as his wife was not disposed to accompany him in all these short expeditions.

The usual mode of conveyance from Lyons to Marseilles was by boat on the Rhone. While preparing for our departure I was surprised to see an extraordinary concourse of people assembled in front of the hotel, all scrambling to find places in vehicles of every description, and all evidently going in the same direction. On inquiry, I learned that they were going to

see and obtain the blessing of a very holy man, the Curé d'Ars. If I had only known then who and what he was, I would gladly have sacrificed everything to see him and to feel his holy hand on my head, but I was not yet sufficiently advanced in spiritual knowledge to appreciate the advantage.

Our voyage down the river was very different from the luxurious travelling of the present day. A wheezy steamer, slow in its movement, uncomfortable in its arrangements, was a poor equivalent for the prices charged ; however, we had the advantage of seeing the country on both sides. Unfortunately, the river was at low water ; we were informed that we could not get beyond Avignon that night. Our party, sooner than remain on board, landed, and spent the night at a hotel. Having some hours to spare in the morning, we had time to see a great deal of this interesting and historical town ; I was especially interested in the ancient palace of the Popes. As usual, Mr. Ram knew his way everywhere without asking a question. We were desired to be on the boat at a fixed hour, but Mrs. Ram had no notion of hurrying herself, and kept them waiting a considerable time. I did not quite understand all the expletives made use of by the captain and his crew ; they were decidedly strong, and not necessary to translate.

Arrived at Marseilles, female dictation

decided that we should remain at the hotel for two or three days, not only for rest, but to undergo a course of medicine in preparation for the next journey. I did not think it at all necessary, but was obliged to submit. The travellers of the present day can see but little from the railway carriages of the magnificent scenery along the south coast of France. They pass from one tunnel to another, and have only a glimpse here and there. Happily, in those days there was no railway. A comfortable open carriage of large dimensions was engaged to take us all the way to Genoa, a journey of several days, stopping and sleeping at all the places of interest. At Genoa we made another halt of a few days. The time was chiefly spent by Mr. Ram in hunting out curios. He seemed to know every corner of the town. Passing down a narrow slummy street, he knew where to find some old fellow, probably a Jew, who he was sure had something worth looking at. I followed him to the top of the house; the visit ended by his purchasing a small illuminated manuscript Office Book, for which he gave £10. Some time after he told me that the first person he showed it to offered him £40 for it, which he refused. His refined taste for every kind of art was a misfortune to himself, as he could not refrain from buying what he admired. Some of his London friends gave him the

rather appropriate name of "The Continental Bagman." It is no part of my object to describe all the places we stopped at; they are all well known to travellers and readers.

We reached Rome about two days before Lent—a most favourable time of year for visiting churches and seeing all the ceremonies. The Carnival was in full swing. Myself and young Edmund had a carriage to ourselves, which made slow progress along the crowded Corso. It was a pretty sight; the houses were adorned with tapestry and silk hangings; but the supposed fun was to try and blind one another with *cônfetti* or chalk-dust. We wore wire masks, which were only a partial protection. Then followed a horse-race without riders. The animals' backs were decorated with flappers pointed with sharp points, which made them fly like mad beasts, until they were caught in a large sheet at the end of the course. I mention these particulars because visitors to Rome at the present day see nothing of them: they have been obsolete for many years.

The following day being Ash Wednesday, we obtained permission to witness the ceremonies in the Sistine Chapel. I had an intense desire to see the great Pontiff Pius IX., and was fortunate enough to secure an excellent position close to the screen. The time of waiting was well em-

ployed in witnessing the arrival of all the Cardinals, among whom I easily recognised our own Cardinal Wiseman; all the officials of the Papal Court, in their quaint and artistic costumes, were objects of great interest to me. Added to these were a number of noblemen and gentlemen of various countries, all in uniform or court dress, who were privileged to be inside the screen and to receive the blessed ashes from the hands of the Holy Father. Several of these were Englishmen; some of old Catholic families, others well-known recent converts to the Faith.

While occupied with these observations, my mind was still in a feverish state of impatience to see the Pope. I said to myself: "There are many kings in the world who claim the homage of their subjects, but there is only one Pope; and he, in a much higher sense, claims the homage of the entire world, as representative of the King of Kings. Half the Christian world does him homage as the Vicar of Christ; the other half, to which I belong, calls him Antichrist." I must have a good look at him.

At length, from the back of the altar there issues an imposing procession. Slowly it passes round the interior space, quite close to the spot where I was standing. I had eyes only for the venerable figure that came last of all. Nearer and nearer he approached, his hand continually raised to

bless the kneeling crowd. I could see, even from a distance, the benevolent expression of his face ; I felt that I had some share in that passing blessing, for my eyes were moist with tears. I could not avoid giving some expression to my feelings, and that in a very unconventional and perhaps unseemly manner, which may have attracted the attention of those near to me. I struck my leg with force and exclaimed, almost aloud : " I'll be hanged if that man is Antichrist." Then the thought forced itself on my mind like an audible voice : " If he is not Antichrist, then he is the Vicar of Christ, and you ought to belong to him."

The only other event during our visit to Rome which is connected with the object of my writing, was the presence of Dr. Manning. His conversion, as every one knows, caused an immense sensation in England. He had been the very sheet-anchor of hundreds of High Church people of both sexes ; his desertion filled many of them with grief and dismay. He had only lately been ordained a true priest, and even then many of his devoted children had followed him, not merely from personal feeling, but from sincere conviction. St. Patrick's Day was close at hand, and he was advertised as the preacher at the Church of St. Isidore, which belonged to the Irish Franciscans. All our party agreed to hear what he had

to say on the festival of Ireland's glorious Saint. When he appeared in the pulpit, I confess to have had a feeling of irritation against him, notwithstanding the softened state of my mind which I had so lately experienced in the presence of the Holy Father. However, we all listened with the deepest attention to his words. His text was taken from 2 Cor. iv. 7: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God, and not of us." The first sentence which he uttered was to this effect: "In the lives of the servants of God two things are especially wonderful—their personal weakness, and the vastness of their works." He proceeded to give instances, especially from the founders of Religious Orders, and ended with a panegyric on "the generous, loving, pure-hearted, enduring children of St. Patrick." The entire sermon may be found in the first volume of his published sermons.

After the service we visited several places of great interest, and returned late to our hotel. Mrs. Ram, who had only accompanied us to the church, informed us that during our absence she received a visit from Dr. Manning, which was not surprising, as they had known each other in London. Their conversation had taken a religious turn, and she admitted that she had rather led to it herself, talking a good deal about

people remaining as they were and serving God in their own way. He, on the contrary, said but little, but made her feel that he was not at all impressed by her arguments. When he rose to take his leave, he only said, very quietly, "He that is not with me is against me," and left her to her own reflections.

Soon after these events we all returned to England by a different route, carrying with us impressions which, at least on my part, were ineffaceable, and destined to grow and increase in spite of surrounding doubts and difficulties of every kind.

V.—LORETO ABBEY AND ITS REV. MOTHER.

No mention has as yet been made of the most important person connected with the history of the events I am endeavouring to record; I therefore devote this chapter to the consideration of the measure in which I and others are indebted to the prayers and zeal of a holy woman—the Superioress of the Convent at Gorey, the outside of which I had so often passed, but which I had never dared to enter.

The Foundress of the Institute to which she belonged was Mrs. Frances Mary Teresa Bull; the Mother House was estab-

lished at Rathfarnham, near Dublin, and within a few years several branch houses were erected in various parts of the country. The life of the Foundress has been written by the Rev. Father Henry Coleridge, S.J. I take the liberty of making a few extracts relative to the house in which I was most interested, and which bear reference to myself and the family with which I was so closely connected.

The Convent of Gorey is connected in the annals of the Institute with the name of its first Superior, Mary Benedicta Somers, who governed it for a considerable number of years. She was one of the choicest flowers of this new religious body. . . . Her characteristic was a remarkable tranquillity and equableness of temper ; she was so unmoved by things that might naturally have disturbed her, that she was thought insensible to them. A Superior once asked her this, and she confessed that she *did* feel them, but always united them at once to the humiliations of our Lord. She was extremely delicate and fragile, but she spared herself in nothing. . . . Gorey was a place where there were strong prejudices, and where the feeling of sectarian hostility ran higher than is usual, even in Ireland. All this prejudice was gradually beaten down by the character and virtues of the new Superior. Her charity to the poor and suffering was boundless ; her practice of continual recollection of the presence of God gave her a singular calmness and dignity in conversation with others.

The parish school for girls and infants was attached to the Convent, and taught by the nuns. Nearly all the scholars were the children of the tenants on the Ramsfort estate, the owners of which considered it a part of their duty to pay an occasional visit to the Convent, and in this way made the acquaintance of the Rev. Mother, whom they held in high esteem. This proceeding was considered an outrage on the Protestant conscience, and its newspaper organs were loud in denouncing their bad example. On one occasion Stephen Ram presented her with a rosary which he had lately brought from the Holy House at Loreto, which he rightly thought would gratify her rather than a more costly present. He little knew the use she made of it, nor did it come to his or my own knowledge until after her death. However, this is the best place for making a record of the inspiration under which she acted. Immediately after his departure she called the entire community together, and, forming a procession, she led the way to the chapel, holding in her hand the rosary, which she placed with great solemnity in the hands of the statue of our Blessed Lady. From that day until her death, prayers were offered on that spot by all the nuns for the conversion of the Ram family. I have reason to believe that I was also included in their devout intention.

I cannot recall to my remembrance whether I had resigned my curacy at this time ; in any case, I am certain that I was paying a long visit to my friends at the Park House. My mind was at that time in that painful state of indecision which so many others have experienced when battling with old prejudices and yet uncertain of the light that was leading them on. At such a moment I received a note from the Rev. Mother, inviting me to witness the clothing of a novice, and hoping that I would try the organ which had recently been erected in the church, and give my opinion as to its merits. I wrote at once to excuse myself, as I was sure she would understand that it would be impossible for one in my position to be present on such an occasion ; but as I was soon leaving the country, I promised to see and thank her for her kindness. Soon after I made up my mind to call at the Convent, and set out at once for that purpose ; but when I arrived at the great gates, I looked to the right and left to make sure that none of the Gorey people saw me when I entered. Seeing that I could hardly escape notice, I am ashamed to confess that I “funked” it, and made no attempt to pass the gate ; still more ashamed am I to acknowledge that the same ridiculous attempt was made on six successive days. The following day, feeling humiliated by my

lack of moral courage, I became desperate, and resolved to enter though all the people of the town might be at the gate. I succeeded in carrying out my resolution ; I passed through without looking at one side or the other. Arriving at the Convent door, I gave a nervous and vigorous pull at the bell. The portress soon appeared, and led me to a small parlour, where I was left to my own meditations for a considerable time. Well I remember the stormy action of my mind during that long wait. First of all, what a fool I was to come here at all ; now in the trap, I must remain in it ; what can I say when I do see them ? I had never seen a regular convent nun in my life, though I had often seen Sisters of Mercy, with their poke bonnets and black veils, in the streets of Dublin.

The door opens ; two nuns enter, looking to me as if they were two living pictures, unlike ordinary mortals of flesh and blood. What I intended to say vanished from my mind. A few words of welcome, gently spoken, put me quite at my ease, and all agitation vanished. Still, I felt and knew that she had invited me, not merely to see me or to hold an ordinary conversation, but to say what perhaps I would rather not have heard. I have no doubt that during the time I was left alone she was on her knees before our Lord in the chapel, praying for light to say what He willed. However,

the first part of our interview was necessary to put me at my ease. I was invited to try the new organ, and I was glad to do so, availing myself of it as a pretext to avoid more serious conversation. All the Sisters were summoned to hear my performance.

Though only a very indifferent organist, I managed to get through some selections from Handel's *Messiah*, which seemed to please them very much. Some general conversation followed on Church music, during which I was pleased to see that darkness was coming on, hoping thereby to escape the notice of the townspeople when I should be leaving, and also—what I feared still more—the private conference with the Rev. Mother which I felt sure was in store for me. I had reached the hall and was making for the door when she stopped me, and asked me to give her a few minutes' conversation in the parlour. I knew that I was in for it, so obeyed with the best grace I could command. I ought to have explained before why she was interested in my behalf. She was well acquainted with all that was taking place at the Park House through the French governess, a remarkable woman, rather advanced in life, who observed everything and said but little. It was only natural that she should in her visits to the Convent speak confidentially about matters which would be so interesting to a religious community, knowing how

earnestly all of them would pray for those who were groping their way towards the full light of faith.

The first word she spoke to me was to ask, Would I object to join them in a novena? My answer was, Perhaps not, if I knew what a novena was. She explained about a nine days' prayer in preparation for the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This was rather too strong, and I was in doubt how to answer her. She then asked: "Do you not believe that she is the true Mother of God?" I answered, with hesitation, that I believed that the Virgin Mother brought forth a son who was truly God made man, but that I could not hold all the extravagant things that were said of her. I looked forward to a time when the Church would modify these matters, and make it possible for all good Christians to join her. She smiled frankly, saying: "Vain hope! The Church is the infallible teacher of all Truth, and will not and cannot alter one word of what she requires all to receive and believe." More followed which need not be told. It ended in her offering me a little book with prayers for the novena. I promised to use it as far as I could conscientiously, and particularly wished to do so at the same hour as themselves, which I learned was at 8 p.m.—a very awkward hour for me, as we were at

dinner at that time. She told me it was not at all necessary to say the prayers at any particular hour. I concluded that this was an end of the interview, but not so. She held a little medal in her hand with a string, and asked me to wear it. I objected, saying: "This is one of your little superstitions which must be abolished before we are all united." Seeing a pained expression on her face, I asked her to let me have it, but would not promise to wear it; and so we parted. Thinking over the interview afterwards, I could not but be filled with admiration of the moral courage exhibited by that holy woman. Nothing but thorough conviction of the truth being on her side could have made her speak so decidedly.

Returning to the house, I found my hosts, who knew of my intended visit, naturally curious to know the particulars. I told them what I thought was prudent, reserving some of the details. However, I soon betrayed myself unwittingly. The Novena was to commence that very evening; and wishing to begin as nearly as possible at the same hour as the Religious at the Convent, I made some excuse to retire to my room so as to join them in spirit. That was easy enough for one evening, but where this little practice was continued on successive evenings, it was impossible to evade the suspicions of

others as to my motives. Mrs. Ram looked at me with one of her penetrating glances, saying: "You think you are deceiving us. I can see through you as plainly as I can see through that glass." And indeed I think she could do so.

Another little difficulty I had to deal with was what to do with the medal I had brought from the Convent. I had no little lock-up place to put it in; it remained in one of my pockets; and as a man-servant removed my clothes to brush them, I was in a panic lest he had found it. The only place I could think of was, after all, to put it round my neck, and there it remained in spite of my protest to the Rev. Mother.

VI.—DECISION AND ITS SEQUEL.

THOSE who have read what I have already written might reasonably conclude that I had quite made up my mind. In fact, I had only arrived at a most painful period, which so many others have passed and will easily understand. Indecision on a matter of such vital importance is a torture greater, I think, than any physical pain. It had, however, to be faced. Things could not remain as they were; I must act. Whom should I consult? I dared not say a word to the family I was staying with, though it

was chiefly owing to them that I had advanced so far. They suspected, but I could not explain. They were leaving the following day for London, to remain there only a few days, preparatory to their going to Paris, where they intended residing for several months. They greatly urged me to follow them thither, and to accept of an appointment at one of the Anglican churches. They had to leave without having exacted any promise.

Left to myself in that solitary house, I had at least time to think and to pray. A happy thought—probably an inspiration—came almost immediately to my mind: I would write to Dr. Manning and ask for an interview. His sermon in Rome had made a great impression on my mind, and being a convert himself he would the more easily understand my difficulties. The answer came at once, and expressed a hope to see me as soon as possible. I was, however, determined not to go to London while my friends were there. Nearly every day I received a letter from Mrs. Ram urging me to go over before they left. Her penetration was extraordinary; she knew me better than I knew myself, and thought that this was the only chance they had of keeping me from taking a step which in a measure would compromise themselves. They would be only two days more in London, and come I *must*.

I was glad to know the day of their departure. The very next day, the coast being clear, I arrived, a stranger in the great city, where I had neither friend nor acquaintance. The cabman asked where he was to drive me to. I desired him to take me to any hotel as near as possible to South Audley Street. As the sole object of my being in London was to have a consultation with Dr. Manning, I lost no time in seeking him. He was then living with a lady relative, a recent convert, who resided in the street I have named. The then new church of the Jesuit Fathers in Farm Street was close at hand; it was in their church that he usually preached and heard confessions. Most of the well-known converts of both sexes belonging to aristocratic families were received into the Church by him, and continued to be his penitents for many years.

My nerves were highly strung when I arrived at the door, but my determination to settle the question one way or the other did not falter. He was not long in coming into the room. His reception was kind, but not particularly encouraging. He spoke but little, asking only a few pertinent questions, leaving me for the rest to explain myself. I have learned by after experience that his method was the best in dealing with inquiring converts. No two persons have exactly the same difficulties,

or are led into the Church in precisely the same way. It not only saves time, but gives the priest a better opportunity of testing the sincerity of their motives.

When I had explained myself as well as I could, he did not attempt to argue. He simply used these words, which I can never forget: "My dear friend, the whole controversy lies in a nutshell: if you really believe in the Holy Ghost and His office in the world, it is impossible not to become a Catholic; you ought to be received into the Church without delay." I started to my feet greatly agitated, saying that that was impossible. I was not prepared for it, though I thought it likely I should do so in course of time. He answered calmly: "It is by no means impossible. I shall be at the church in Farm Street at four o'clock this afternoon, and I expect to see you there. Kneel before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament: I shall find you there." I made no promise, and left him.

The intervening hours were painful beyond description. The hour named was approaching and I was still undecided. I at last determined to go and keep my appointment so far as to see him again and explain that I could not act so hastily.

I set out for that purpose, but, not knowing the intricacies of Mayfair, I made a mistake, and entered a church which was certainly not the one I was looking for.

Coming out, I hailed a hansom cab, and desired the driver to take me to Farm Street. Coming to Berkeley Street, we found the roadway up for the laying of a new drain, and therefore impassable. Cabby offered to take me round ; but, as Farm Street was close to the other side, I alighted, and was looking about for Farm Street when I suddenly encountered Dr. Manning. Of course I told him of my mistake. He only smiled, saying, "You are not likely to make any more mistakes," and marched me with him to the church. Without giving me time to say anything, he showed me where to kneel before the altar, and in a short time beckoned me to come to him to one of the little rooms which were used as confessionals.

Before I could well consider what I was doing, I was in the act of making my confession. He naturally helped me to examine my conscience, which I trust I was able to do with all sincerity and proper dispositions. Before receiving absolution I had to read aloud the Profession of Faith which is always essential in such cases. Then followed conditional baptism, when he made use of such a quantity of water that the front of my shirt and other garments was drenched.

Let it not be imagined for a moment that this great and holy man acted unwisely or with undue precipitation. He was a keen reader of character ; he could see at once

that the Holy Spirit was leading me on, that I endured much mental suffering, and that it would be dangerous to leave me for another day exposed to such trials and temptations.

It was on the 12th of December, 1854, that this great grace was conferred upon me, and the 17th of the same month I made my first Communion at the altar of the Sacred Heart, administered to me by the same kind and holy hand.

During these days I had many consultations with him as to my future. He asked if I had any plan in view. I answered that I had but one desire, and that was to become a true priest. This seemed to give him great satisfaction, especially as I expressed a wish to remain in Westminster Diocese. As I had very small means at my disposal, he proved himself to be a true friend in every way : he asked some friends of his, a dear old couple—Mr. and Mrs. Foxhall, living in the same street—if they would take me in for a time, which accordingly they did, treating me with more than ordinary kindness, and continuing fast friends until the day of their death, though I only remained with them about a month. During my stay with them I was confirmed by His Eminence Cardinal Wiseman in his private chapel in Golden Square. He was pleased to accept me as a subject, and suggested my going to Rome in prepara-

tion for receiving Holy Orders. This was a great joy to me.

During my short stay in London I received some letters which were not very agreeable reading. One of them was from my eldest brother, Joseph, who wrote a furious epistle demanding answers to some outrageous questions as to what I was supposed to believe. In my reply I was not to give any reasons—only yes or no, as he wished to judge whether I was a knave or a fool. I only mention this to show the wonderful ways of God in leading souls to Himself. He was the only member of my family who eventually became a Catholic: the lion was turned into a lamb. He often came to London, and occasionally, even before his conversion, dined with the community at Bayswater, attracted by the personality of Dr. Manning, and at last was received into the Church by him. It was my happiness when he died, at his house at Bray, to be with him and assist him in his last hours. He died August 30th, 1894. R.I.P.

Among his papers after death, I found a beautiful rule of life written by Dr. Manning, which I have reason to believe he acted up to so long as health permitted.

I also received a severe letter from Mr. Ram, requiring me not to take any decisive step for at least six months, as he would not have it said that I had become a Catholic

immediately on leaving his house. I wrote at once to inform him that I had already taken that step and hoped soon to be on my way to Rome, making no apology for the inconvenience I might have occasioned him. In reply, I received the following characteristic letter, which I transcribe from the original :

My dear Kirk,—The least said is the soonest mended, and as you have been and done it I should only waste words in defining my ideas of difference of opinion in religion ; which, after all, to my mind, is only variation of opinion. I am quite satisfied in being saved, if I deserve it, in the religion in which I was born. I think it far from perfect, as you know ; but as I think Roman Catholicism equally so, I don't think it worth while running from Scylla into Charybdis ; but I can quite understand anybody like yourself, having reasonable doubts on the subject, doing that which would ease their minds from individual responsibility. I only feared you were too much in a hurry, and in your zeal bringing a hornets' nest on yourself and us ; which you might be sorry for hereafter if your views altered : if a man once changes, there is no reason why he should not do so half a dozen times again. However, I hope, for your own sake, this will not be the case with you, and that we shall (as Tolfrey used to say) yet see you officiating in amber-coloured garments.

I am very curious to know how, where, and when you made your profession, and whether

you found it a very nervous affair. I am sure that Dr. Manning was all kindness to you, for I am sure he is thoroughly sincere in what he thinks right to profess. The nuns at Gorey will certainly think your conversion is owing to their Novena, and it will give them confident hopes of our following your example.

If you go to Rome you must look us up *en route*. When I come there you will change places with me as lioniser—how *rôles* change in this life! I dreamt the other night I was travelling and went into a Franciscan convent where you were playing the organ *con amore*. I shall expect all your news, and you ought to have a budget that will amuse us soon; and now I will tell you mine. Know, then, that I have taken a very pretty hotel all to myself near the Barrière, with stables and coach-house, and am getting comfortably settled.

We have had some charming services at the Madeleine this week. The organist has surpassed himself in exquisite playing; he is pronounced now by every one the first organ-player in the world. The Establishment (English) drags on as usual—the same delightful duets, and Chamier's orations to the same respectable congregation. The boys and little Mary are in great force; there will be a child's ball at the Embassy, to which she will go. I suppose you will not remain long at Worcester; you certainly will not return to Ireland, nor shall I for a spell. I should like to see the Dean's face when he first hears from you. . . .

Yours very sincerely,

STEPHEN RAM.

Pending arrangements for my departure to Rome, I thought it a good opportunity for paying a visit to my brother William, who was then living at Worcester. I wrote to say that I should be glad to spend the Christmas with him, if he had no objection to receive his Popish brother. The reply being favourable, I arrived on Christmas Eve. He was not long in asking an explanation of my extraordinary letter. "I really thought for a moment," he said, "that perhaps you had become a Papist." I was washing my hands at the time, and answered very quietly: "You were quite right; I am really one." I prepared for some strong expression of disapproval. After a little silence, his words were: "I respect any man who changes his religion, because it proves that he thinks, which so few ever give themselves the trouble to do. Now that you are a Papist I hope they will soon make a Cardinal of you." So, the little explosion being over, matters became easy between us. Strange to say, some years after, he himself became an Anglican clergyman.

Early in January, 1855, I returned to London, remaining with my hospitable old friends in South Audley Street. During this time I was confirmed by Cardinal Wiseman at his private chapel in Golden Square: he had already accepted me as his subject, and wished me to pursue my

theological studies at the Collegio Pio in Rome.

Meanwhile, I wrote to my friends in Paris to let them know that I wished to see them on my way to Italy. Mrs. Ram answered that, however much they wished to see me, they could not take me in, as it would be too much for the feelings of the household if I suddenly appeared with shaved face and a long cassock ; but if I let her know where I was staying, she would come and see me.

I informed her that I was only passing through Paris ; and, as there was not any change in my personal appearance, I should certainly call and see her in their own house. Accordingly I presented myself the day after my arrival, and was well received by both. After a general conversation, it was soon evident that Mrs. Ram was desirous of having a private talk with myself, which no doubt her husband perceived and intended to frustrate. Any woman accustomed to have her own will in all things generally manages to have it, even in spite of opposition ; so I was not surprised when she turned to him, saying: "I see, Stephen, you are trying to prevent me from having a private conversation with Mr. Kirk. I am determined to have it, and you had better take up your hat and go for a walk." He took it most good-humouredly, and left us alone.

The gist of what she wished to say was a

tearful protest against my having abandoned them. One sentence I remember to the letter : " We have been travelling together through the wilderness, and now we have approached the Jordan, you cruelly leave us shivering on the banks."

To this I replied : " Is not that exactly what I ought to have done? It was my duty and privilege to be the first to cross the river and set my foot on the promised land, so that now, standing on the other side, I beckon to you to follow, and tell you there is nothing to fear."

VII.—COLLEGIO PIO AND ITS INMATES.

My second visit to Rome was under happier auspices than the former : no longer with any doubts or difficulties of mind. A firm faith resting on the Rock, and under the very shadow of Peter himself in the person of his representative, and the inheritor of all the prerogatives bestowed on him by his Divine Master, made amends for all the previous disquietude of conscience, as well as the many obstacles of a temporal nature which seemed unsurmountable.

It would probably interest some of my readers to know something of the history of the College. It had not been more than one

year in existence at the date of my arrival, which was February 19th, 1855. At that time there was a considerable number of Anglican convert clergymen preparing for the priesthood attending the course of studies at the Collegio Romano, and residing in their own private apartments. The Holy Father did not approve of their living in that way, and desired that they should live together in community. All of them expressed a desire to do so, but did not know how it could be arranged. The Pope then took it into his own hands, and gave them a large suite of rooms in the Piazza Scossa Cavalli, quite near to the Piazza of St. Peter's; appointed a Rector; and called it, after himself, the "Collegio Pio." All the rooms were appropriated at once except one, which was soon occupied by myself.

Nothing could be more agreeable than the society of highly educated men, nearly all of them graduates of Oxford or Cambridge, full of reminiscences of their past lives, and all looking forward to promoting the Faith among their fellow-countrymen. Some, however, among them were not converts, but old Catholics, who found their vocation later in life. The mixture was decidedly an advantage to both.

Within a short time the number of applicants increased so largely, it was found impossible to continue in our limited

quarters. A proposal was made to the Rector of the English College in the Via Monserato to allow an unused portion of the building to be prepared for our reception, while we kept our own rules as formerly, and remained under a Rector of our own. This was agreed to, and acted on as soon as the necessary alterations were made.

The Collegio Inglese was, and still is, one of the most venerable institutions in Rome; not only on account of age, but because hallowed by the memory of its martyrs, who shed their blood in every part of England in defence of the Faith during the sixteenth century. Almost facing the door of the College was the abode of dear St. Philip Neri. We are told that every time he met a *camerata* of the English students taking their daily walk, he invariably took off his hat and saluted them with the words, “*Salvete, Flores Martyrum*”—“Hail, ye flowers of Martyrs.” St. Philip and St. Charles Borromeo were contemporaries and most dear friends; and now, in these peaceful times, both are represented in England by the Communities of the Oratory and the Oblate Fathers of St. Charles,—of the latter of which companies I have the privilege of being a member.

My new mode of life did not so entirely engross all my time and thoughts as to render

me forgetful of my old friends, for whom I offered many prayers at all the notable shrines in the Holy City. We kept up an irregular kind of correspondence, of which some few letters remain still in my hands. I subjoin some extracts from a long and characteristic letter which gives an interesting account of nearly all the members of the Ram family :

7, Rue de Balzac,

April 5th, 1855.

My dear Kirk,—It is really a perfect age since I last wrote to you ; but when I tell you the cause, I am sure you will feel for me and excuse me. Soon after I received your last letter, in the midst of our amusements here, we were summoned off at a moment's notice by poor Emmy having been seized at Seawells with a violent rheumatic attack. We found him very ill *indeed*, moved him to Brookman's, and then to London, where we have been at Mivart's ever since until three days ago, when we were enabled to remove him to Paris. He never slept for eight nights or days, and now only hobbles about with a stick. I am giving him now artificial Aix la Chapelle baths, but I suppose in the summer I shall have to give him the real thing. Jem, too, has been on my hands ill from Eton, but is getting on all right now. I heard at the Horse Guards that he will probably get his commission next year, so he is working away to be up to the mark. Abel, too, I have succeeded in getting an appointment to Woolwich ; so he will

have an examination to undergo in a few months. Edmund will not go back to school again. London was very foggy and *triste*. I saw, however, the Wicklows, Lady Petre, etc., but I did not talk about *you*.

I went one Sunday to Farm Street, and I passed by the Oratory one day, but did not hear any service. It is the most like a Benedictine establishment I have yet seen in England. The temporary long church has quite a picturesque Italian look. Richard's new temporary church in Margaret Street is very nice. Nugee is there now ; the organist is very good. The Introits and choir and style of music is better and more devotionally done than anything I have yet heard in any of our churches.

I have read Waterworth, and think it very ably written, and a dangerous book for *good* Protestants ; so I shall not give strong meat to babes. I wrote to the Dean about you, and he says in reply : " Dear Kirk has been lost by his love of the arts and passion for music, and also the separation in my house from his old associates : he felt himself an alien, and he was lost." He weeps over your unhappy fate.

You seem to be charmingly placed in Rome, in the midst of everything. I envy you your Lent and Holy Week. I was only once there in Holy Week, seventeen years ago. The change to you must be great—living a religious life, and following all the ceremonies with the guides and expounders you have around you. I suppose you are making great progress in talking Italian and Latin, but your being placed among so many compatriots stands in your way.

I shall be most anxious always to hear of your proceedings and progresses. You must look a sad object without whiskers, and a skull cap on your head ; but no doubt it gives you a more devout appearance, which is quite in character with your future calling. I forgot to mention how the Dean darkly mentioned that there was a certain person in my house he had always feared you were the first victim of her machinations.* I have secured a beautiful piece of mediæval jewellery—an enamelled crystal cross—for Mrs. Ram, which is a great *bijou*. I perpetrated nothing else. All desire to be kindly remembered to you.

And believe me, dear Kirk,

Yours very sincerely,

STEPHEN RAM.

P.S.—I wish you could get me some information concerning the Religious Orders in Switzerland ; what houses remain unsuppressed in the different cantons of men, and their denominations. There have been so many changes of late. I suppose all the Sardinian houses will go, but I took all the statistics of them when I was in the country.

I have inserted nearly the whole of this letter as it so well describes the character and the attractions of the writer.

It was about this time that His Holiness Pius IX. paid us a paternal visit at our College. It was a great and unusual honour, and highly appreciated by all the members. He was truly like a father visiting his sons—so friendly, loving, and

* Allusion is made to the French governess.

unconventional. The weather at the time was very cold, so we had a good fire in our community-room, which greatly attracted him. He stood in front of it, then turned his back to it, as if he had never seen one in his life before ; in fact, he was never accustomed to such a luxury. In the vast Palace of the Vatican there was no such thing as a fireplace. The early mode of warming a room was by a *scaldino* or warming-pan with hot ashes, and this was and is the common practice in all Italian households. I have already described the effect produced on me the first time I saw him on that memorable Ash Wednesday in the Sistine Chapel, and now what a joy it was to feel his hand on my head, bestowing on me the Apostolic Blessing and receiving me as one of his sons.

It must have been about this time that I wrote a very plain-spoken letter to Mrs. Ram. I have not the least remembrance of my words, but I was out of all patience with their long delay in not acting according to their conscience, and must have used reproaches which were not palatable, and drew from her the sharp rejoinder contained in the following reply :

7, Rue Balzac, Paris,

June 13th, 1855.

Dear Mr. Kirk,—Your long joint letter to Mr. Ram and me was received with great pleasure by us both. I can assure you, you cannot

write too often ; we are always very glad to hear from you and all about you. We were by no means offended at the opprobrious parts ; Mr. Ram laughed very heartily at them, and I felt sometimes inclined to join ; but if you speak your mind so plainly to all your friends, I do not wonder, considering that the Irish character is neither unprejudiced nor forbearing, that you get no answer or disagreeable ones. Pray do not suppose I mean to be personal, for I can honestly aver that you yourself are a most decided exception to this rule ; and this, perhaps, is the cause of your feeling and acting differently to your neighbours. As to what you say of *myself*, I do not consider that part opprobrious at all, but true—all too true—and written I know in the kindest spirit. I cannot deny anything ; for I have so often spoken openly to you that it would be a folly ; and whenever we meet again you will find that I always *speak* the truth as to my religious feelings, but I can't write of them : the letter may miscarry, etc., and I have a habit of doubting the *discretion de la Poste* ; and, indeed, I have nothing new to say. Thank you very much for your prayers ; in which please persevere, for I need them sorely. Alas ! I have only lately learned what a hold the world and the things of the world have on my heart. I used to think that I loved God best ; but alas ! it is not so ; my late bitter trial* has showed me much of my own wickedness. You (who, I know, have a better opinion of me than I

* This is in allusion to the death of her sister, the Countess of E——, a most admirable woman.

deserve) could never believe how unlike a Christian at first I bore it. Oh the despair ! the want of submission ! the misery of no settled faith ! Words and books and prayers that were wont to stir my heart's core had now no power : I was like a stone—like Niobe (a most unchristian character) ; and I, who generally weep so easily, had no tears. Perhaps this was partly physical as the shock was so great : it was like a sudden death. Now—God be praised !—I am better in mind and body. My dear sister lost her speech almost directly. She knew she was dying, and when asked if she was willing, answered, “ Yes, but not in my own strength, not in my own merits.” She was also heard to say, “ More grace, Lord, more grace.” These were all the words after my distracting journey by sea and land that I could gather—not a message for her husband or for me ; yet these few words have been to me a great comfort. I think of “ Lord, remember me when Thou comest to Thy kingdom,” and the gracious answer. She died firm in faith in Jesus, and the faith she had always followed ; and it was the best she had, though it may not have been altogether yours or mine ; and we know who said, “ If I had not spoken, then these had not sin.” She acted up to her belief, which is more than some of us (I, for one) can say. She certainly had many “ good works to follow her.” I pray, however, constantly and earnestly for her, and trust you will keep your promise and do so too.

I am glad to hear that you are so happy in your own mind, but as to our meeting you in

Rome, I fear that is very unlikely. Jem, you know, is at Eton. Abel is, I believe, to go there too after Midsummer, and we cannot live at such a distance. Emmy is gone to Aix with Mademoiselle, and we follow next week, and shall hang about the Rhine for two or three months. Emmy is better—almost well again—and often talks of you, and thinks a great deal about you, I know. I should be very happy for him to write to you, but he has never taken a pen in his hand since his illness, and you know what sort of a scribe he is. He was very much surprised and upset when I told him of the step you had taken. He has, I assure you, the greatest affection for you. I *have* read “Fabiola”: it is charming. I am reading Waterworth, and I have “The Golden Manual”—what a treasure! We were all at the Madeleine on Corpus Christi. They gave the Benediction outside, and the French ladies went down on their knees in the dust—a thing unheard of since the Revolution. So did I, and my prayer was, “Bless me, even me also, oh my Father!”—though I know I did not deserve it. No room for more

Believe me, dear Mr. Kirk,

Your very sincere friend,

MARY C. RAM.

Any one reading this letter will see at once that the writer had reached that critical point from which she could not recede, but still needed some special movement of Divine Grace to enable her to act with courage and resolution. The follow-

ing chapter will record the source from which she derived the strength she needed.

VIII.—REV. MOTHER'S DEATH AND ITS RESULTS.

Two months after the receipt of the letter recorded in the last chapter, I was rejoiced to receive the first and only one written to me by the Mother Mary Benedicta Somers ; which I have carefully preserved as a relic of a very holy woman, to whose prayers and interest in my behalf I was deeply indebted. It was as follows :

Loreto Abbey, Gorey,

August 20th, 1855.

My dear and esteemed Rev. Friend,—With very sincere pleasure I received your letter on the feast of the Visitation. I am very grateful for your remembrance of us in the little Abbey. Your welfare and happiness shall always be a subject of deep interest to us.

Now that you feel and know what a beloved Mother you have in Heaven, so powerful with her Divine Son, and who never ceases to watch over her faithful children, this it is that warms the heart and makes it abound in a cheering, consoling hope. Every day we have from Mary new proofs of her maternal affection. This you feel, and I bless God a thousand times in the day. I promise without fail every year we shall offer the Novena in honour of our Immaculate Mother for the conversion of our

Protestant clergy in this parish and diocese. Some one out of all may co-operate with grace, and feel the mercy of God. Holy thoughts and pious inspirations lead the soul imperceptibly on to meet that chain which will unite us to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

We know very little of Mr. Ram and family now, as they continue on the Continent. May God grant them light and grace with *courage* to overcome the world.

My health has failed considerably this last season. I went to one of the Dublin convents to have advice of physicians. After three weeks I returned no better ; consumption has set in, so that I don't expect to see next October. My greatest consolation is having given twenty years to the service of the Almighty ; and though my life has been very imperfect, I have a strong hope in the mercy of God.

The Rev. J. Lacy, P.P., desires his most sincere regards. We heard once of you since through Dr. Kirby ; it gave us the first intimation of your safe arrival in Rome.

I won't forget you whenever permitted to enter my happy blissful home—Heaven. Remember me at the holy altar.

Ever believe me to remain, my dear Rev. Sir,
Yours sincerely grateful in Jesus,

MARY BENEDICTA SOMERS.

The prevision of her death proved only too true : at the end of the following month, on the 29th of September, the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, she breathed out her pure soul. May we not believe that

the great Archangel conducted her to the Throne of God? It is not without good reasons I may surmise that such was really the case. First of all, her passing away was immediately followed by the conversion of the entire family for whom she had offered so many prayers during her life.

The details of this great event are so wonderful and beautiful, I fear that I must fail in giving them due expression. The letter written to me by the sorrowing nuns at Gorey was accompanied by another from Paris, written by Mrs. Ram, who at the time had no knowledge of the death of Mother Benedicta. I have searched in vain for the letter I received from Paris; but on reading the account written by Father Coleridge, S.J., in his *Life of Mother Ball*, I am almost persuaded that I must have sent that particular letter for the consolation of the nuns, and that the Rev. Father derived most of his information from that source. I have therefore no hesitation in copying a certain portion of his history which I know to be exactly accurate.

At the moment of her [Mother Benedicta's] death she seems to have appeared to a lady in Paris as yet a Protestant, for whose conversion she had long been praying. The incident is attested by a letter from the lady herself, and is too remarkable to be passed over in silence.

"I will strive to put on paper," writes the lady in question, "the vision with which my weak

and wavering mind was fortified, and whereby strength and confidence were given me to take that step for which, during eternity, I shall love God and return thanks to Him."

The remainder I write from my own memory, which I know to be exact in the smallest detail :

"I was not well, and went to bed early. I felt no inclination to sleep. After a short time the door seemed to open, and to my great surprise I saw the Rev. Mother of Gorey enter my room. I was not alarmed—only surprised. She said nothing, but beckoned to me to leave my bed and follow her. It seemed to me that I actually did leave the bed and followed her into a large room—though I was in my own house I had never seen that room before. It was very large and absolutely bare of all furniture, neither was there any ordinary way of lighting it ; but at the extreme end of the room there was a most wonderful brilliant light. I looked to see what it came from, and there I beheld a huge cross, without any figure, emitting dazzling rays. I stood in rapture before it, lost in admiration of the beautiful sight. A slight touch from the Rev. Mother recalled me to myself. She then spoke these words in a soft voice : ' My child, it is of no use to stand admiring the beauties of the Cross ; it will not benefit you unless you embrace and carry it. Pray for strength to do that which you know to be right.' These last words were repeated two or three times."

Awakening in the morning she relates that she felt as if she had been praying

all night, and had received the grace she needed, and resolved to act in obedience to the Divine call whatever the consequences might be. Her greatest difficulty was the displeasure it might occasion her husband ; she was at least determined not to act without his knowledge. This was a wise resolution, no doubt dictated by the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, after breakfast she opened the subject by informing him that she intended calling that morning to see Père de Ravignan, at the Convent of the Sacré Cœur. He took the alarm at once and exclaimed hastily : “ My God, Mary, you don’t mean anything particular, do you ? ”

“ Yes,” she replied, “ I do mean something very particular : I intend asking him to receive me into the Catholic Church.” He remained perfectly silent for some minutes ; then starting to his feet he exclaimed : “ If you are determined on going, you shall not go alone ; I will go with you.” It was the moment of grace for himself.

Both of them were formally received into the Church, and I believe made their first Communion on the following morning, their perfect knowledge of Catholic doctrines rendering it unnecessary to delay them by any prolonged instruction.

A further and still more wonderful confirmation that the prayers, and the holy death, of Mother Benedicta had much to do with the conversion of this family, came

to my knowledge several months after the event. I record it here as it is a part of the history connected with the events of that time.

In the following year, 1856, I obtained permission to spend my summer vacation with my friends in Paris, instead of going to our country house at Monte Porzio. It was a mutual pleasure to meet again under such changed and happy circumstances.

I was not their only visitor; I was surprised and pleased to meet the Rev. Father Lacy, the P.P. of Gorey, who had come over on purpose to congratulate his parishioners on their conversion. After many interesting conversations I said to him: "I cannot but believe that this family owe a great deal to the prayers of the Rev. Mother at Gorey." His reply was: "No one can know that better than myself, for I was with her the moment she died." I begged of him to tell me all details, and this is the account he gave me.

"I had been with her most of the day hoping she might recover consciousness, as she had been quite in a comatose state. All the nuns were praying about her bedside, waiting for her last moment. Suddenly, to our great astonishment, she who had been utterly unable to move sat up in her bed, and with a loud voice spoke these words: 'I have been praying for years for the conversion of this family. Now I am

on the point of appearing before Almighty God, and I offer my life for their conversion.' Immediately after the words were spoken she fell back and expired."

Having made careful inquiry as to the exact hour of her holy death I found that it corresponded to a minute with her supposed appearance in Paris. Distance, of course, makes no difficulty to a disembodied spirit : her thoughts, under God, were centred on a soul in great distress and spiritual danger ; her own soul, freed from the body, flew as a messenger from Him to inspire confidence in the Divine protection, and resolution to embrace the cross—heavy, indeed, in appearance, but scintillating with heavenly light and love.

A great moral victory had been gained ; but natural anxiety remained with respect to their children. The three elder were boys—Stephen James, Edmund, and Abel. Though quite young they had a will of their own, and their parents were wise in not making any attempt to coerce them. In the course of time they were seen practising little devotions of their own, which ended in a willing acquiescence with their parents' wishes—not all at the same time, but in their own independent manner. All three wrote nice little letters to me on their reception into the Church. The only one I can find is that written by Edmund, to whom

I was particularly attached. It is dated January 3rd, 1856 :

“I write to you to-day, being the first day I can sympathise with you. We are all now of one Church ; my name is Paul, and Arthur is named after you. You know I never wrote very well, so you must forgive this writing as my hand trembles. . . .

“It is very sad you should not be the same with your family as I am. Pray that they may be so, and I will help you with my little prayers. I am in such joy to have made my confession and to have received my first Communion. Pray for me. I implore of you to write to me. Good-bye now, for at three o'clock we go to be confirmed by the Cardinal Archbishop of Rheims.

Your affectionate friend,

EDMUND RAM.

A few days before receiving this pleasing little note I was tonsured by Archbishop Bussi, Vicegerent of Rome ; on December 21st I received two minor Orders, at St. John Lateran, from Cardinal Patrizi ; and on the following day the other two from the Vicegerent.

Another little incident perhaps worth notice occurred about this time. Wandering among some of the ancient buildings and monuments, and wondering how so many sensible people of all nationalities who visited these venerable remains could be guilty of the barbarism of scribbling their names on them, I discovered the

name of my brother Joseph, who had visited Rome some three years previously. I should not have given him credit for such bad taste. Notwithstanding my objection to the practice, I took my pencil and drew the sign of the Cross underneath his name, adding my own, together with these words: "May this sign unite us." And so God willed it; a year or so after that he could make the sign of the Cross for himself, as I have already recorded.

IX.—OTHER REMARKABLE CONVERSIONS.

THE Rev. Father de Ravignan, S.J., and Madame Davidoff, the well-known nun attached to the Convent of the Sacred Heart, were busily occupied during the year 1856; the latter in preparing a considerable number of English and American Protestants for reception into the Church, and after due instruction placing them in the hands of the Jesuit Father. Though personally acquainted with most of them, I have not undertaken to record their history, and must limit my account to those who were connected with the county of Wexford, confining myself in this chapter to one particular family.

Anthony Cliffe was the head of a very old family, and the owner of considerable

property in the county. His residence was a beautiful place called Bellevue, on the river Slaney, and about fifteen miles from Gorey. An exceedingly interesting "History of the Conversion of the Cliffe Family" has been written, at the request of the Abbot of Mount Melleray, by one of the daughters, Jane, afterwards married to Mr. Reddington Roche, of Rye Hill, Co. Galway. The account was written and published in 1880, many years after the events recorded; but as it forms a portion of the history of 1856, it naturally finds its proper place in the records of that year.

It is dedicated "To our dear Lady, in humble gratitude for all the graces and blessings we have received, through her intercession, from her Divine Son; and begging of her, that we who still remain may persevere in love and devotion to our holy Faith"; and runs as follows:

November 21st, 1868.

. . . You have wished that I should write you some account of the wonderful conversion of our whole family, and in particular of that of my father. High Church tendencies, that for a long time most of the family (and especially my mother and eldest brother) had held, no doubt tended considerably to pave the way to Catholicity. I wrote to my father some time ago, telling him that you were anxious to have some account of his own conversion, and I now quote his answer:

“The Lord Abbot of Mount Melleray, you tell me, is so good as to ask some account of my conversion ; I have very little to tell on the subject. The good God, I believe, was long, and unawares to myself, preparing me for this blessed change ; and every day that I live I desire to praise Him more and more, for a gift that is more valuable to me than all the world could offer. The first thing, probably, that moved me in the right direction was reading the ‘Tracts for the Times’ ; these gave me a high veneration for the Church of Christ and for the Clerical Character. I then, for the first time, began to read Church History. I was fully persuaded at this time, and until my conversion, that the Church of England was a true branch of the Church Catholic ; and I took up Church History, expecting to find my faith in this belief strengthened. But great was my grief, when I came to the end of ‘Collins’ Ecclesiastical History’ (a Protestant standard work in ten volumes), to find my faith rather shaken than strengthened in the Church of England ; and from that time till my conversion I entertained a high respect for the Church of Rome. There were many things which happened in the Church of England which contributed to shake my then faith ; amongst others the Gorham case, and particularly (a very short time before my conversion) the case of Archdeacon Denison. But what completely did the work for me was, when we were living in Paris, reading a book which was lent by Mr. Ram to your mother, viz., ‘Waterworth’s History of the Reformation.’ Though this book used to

put me into a great rage, I could not lay it down ; and at the same time I took up other controversial books. I was given the grace to pray for guidance ; and I determined, cost what it might, to take the side my judgment pointed out to me to be the true one. I never spoke to a priest, or to a single person outside my own family on the subject until after I had made up my mind to enter the Catholic Church. Your mother was, you know, for many years favourable to the Catholic Church before we thought about it. As for yourself and my other children, they and you must speak for yourselves. It has always been an astonishment to me *how* it came about with you all. God be praised for the mercy !”

My eldest brother was the first of the family to be received into the Church. He had worked it out privately with Father Kirk ; and then, the evening before his reception, he suddenly announced to us all his intention to be received the next day. I shall never forget my father’s joy on hearing this ; for he himself had, unknown to us all, except my mother, made up *his* mind also to be a Catholic.

It was a strange family scene that night. There were nine of us there, some overjoyed, some wavering, others horrified and *miserable* at the work that was going on, and *hating* and *fearing* the Church that was drawing so many of the family into it. On the 8th of October my eldest brother was received ; and on the following morning my father ; and on the 21st of the same month my mother, and my dear sister Cecilia (since dead), followed the good

example. A little more than a week saw three more of our number ripe for the Church, my sisters Isabella and Eleanor (the nun at Mount Anville) and myself; on the Feast of All Saints we three were received. And now my two eldest sisters alone remained of our number then living together firm Protestants. Hard was the struggle they made to remain stanch to their old belief; but they felt they were being, as it were, *sucked* into the wave that was stretched out to grasp them, bitterly against their own will, but feeling utterly helpless to resist, and *intense* was their *fear* and *hatred* of the Church that was causing such disturbance to their peace of mind. My sister Isabella had been equally vigorous in her resistance to the Faith, and when *she* too left the ranks my poor elder sisters were in despair. They have themselves said that when they have retired to their rooms for the night, all through this turbulent time, they have been distinctly conscious of *good and bad spirits* being present, contending and drawing different ways for the possession of them! It was very evident that the devil was working his utmost to keep those poor souls out of the Church. (I ought to mention that all along they were *of their own free will* studying the subject from the same controversial books that had convinced the others before them.) But all was in vain, for in another week they too gave in, and, like all the others before them, were received, November 7th, by the Père de Ravignan into the true Fold.

In one little month had all this happened; and then, on the 21st of the same month of

November, 1856 (this very day twelve years ago), we all, nine in number, had the happiness of being confirmed in our new Faith by the Papal Nuncio. Three other Irish converts were confirmed at the same time, and we nearly filled the sanctuary of the Sacré Cœur Chapel, Rue de Varennes, with our numbers. The chapel was crowded, for it was considered an extraordinary event, and the news of it had spread in all directions over Paris ; and numbers came to see the sight of the large English family that had been converted, and were to be confirmed. We were told afterwards that the sight was so moving, that some of those who witnessed it, even among the French, shed tears. As for my own feelings on that occasion, and all through that happy time, I cannot describe them, but I can never forget them—an intense peace and joy which I never knew before, or since, for it is only at such a time one could feel it.

The Père de Ravignan preached a most touching discourse ; and it may not be out of place here to quote a paragraph from his Life, written by M. de Saint Albin, shortly after the death of the saintly Jesuit, in which the writer gives a portion of the discourse. Speaking of our confirmation M. de Saint Albin says :

“ Il me reste à raconter la plus touchante des conversions qui peuvent trouver place ici dès aujourd'hui. Mais j'aime mieux reproduire encore simplement le récit du témoin qui me la rapporte.

“ L'autel du Sacré Cœur était entouré de deux familles amies, au nombre de douze per-

sonnes, qui, après avoir reçu le saint Baptême et la sainte Eucharistie, attendaient l'imposition des mains d'un illustre prélat. Le Reverend Père monte en chaire et commence ainsi son discours :

“ ‘ Que notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ soit loué et aimé d'avoir laissé à son Eglise des sacrements qui régénèrent, vivifient, comme aux premiers jours du Christianisme ! Mes enfants en Jesus Christ, je vous ai tout donné ! Ici mon pouvoir s'arrête, quand mon cœur voudrait encore verser sur vous des torrents de grâce divine. Avec la plénitude de votre Foi nouvelle, inclinez vos fronts sous les mains du Pontife qui va appeler sur vous les dons les meilleurs de l'Esprit-Saint ! . . . Que les joies chrétiennes sont pures, ô mon Dieu ! Et que le jour où nos frères séparés se réunissent à nous, a de douceurs ! ’ ”

I may now quote my sister Eleanor's account of *her* conversion. She was only sixteen at this time, but had always shown an inquiring and serious turn of mind, with an extraordinary dislike to the world :

“ First of all I may say with truth that I never liked the English Church so well as when I saw so many of our family going over to the Catholic side ; and I clung to the Protestant religion as an unfortunate person would cling to a plank to save himself from drowning.

“ I confess that I could scarcely satisfy myself of the justice of my cause. I *felt* it was a bad one, and not without reason, for common sense alone sufficed to tell me that, when almost all the others, after having care-

fully studied the subject, had come to *one* conclusion, I had no good reason for remaining apart from them. As well as I can at present recollect it was Dr. Allies' book on the 'See of Rome'" (this book also converted my sister Isabella) "that caused my conversion, and I believe it was *you* that persuaded me to read it. I had not read any controversial book before; you know that you and Isabella were convinced of the falseness of the Anglican Church some time before I was. I can say, with perfect truth, that I was not in the slightest degree *forced* into the Catholic Church. I was left quite at liberty to choose for myself" (and this each one of us can *most distinctly* and *positively* aver). "In reading the book I have just mentioned I felt precisely as if *scales* were falling from my eyes, and although since then my faith has, I trust, with God's grace, become *stronger*, yet I felt the truth more *palpably* at the beginning of my conversion. Did I ever tell you how affected I was when first I recited the *Hail Mary* and the *Confiteor*? I shed torrents of tears without being able to stop them, and even without knowing well *why* I cried so much. This, then, is the history of *my* conversion; I hope that the good Abbot and you will find it satisfactory."

And now *two alone* of the family still remained Protestants. My two younger brothers were not with us in Paris when this great change took place amongst us. They were absent with their regiments, and *apparently* there was but small hope of *their* conversion. But God's mercies were far from having come to an end in

our regard. Just one year after our conversion my second brother, Charles, was received into the Church on the 17th of October, 1857. From having been without any religion, as so many Protestant young men unhappily are, he became a most earnest and devout Catholic, and a bright example to all who knew him. I have already told you, my Lord Abbot, of his holy and happy death. His sufferings were very severe and tedious, but they were borne with the most perfect resignation. He was attended by the good Sœurs de Bon Secours, and they have said of his death that it was never their lot to see a more edifying one. He had a great devotion to the Passion of our Lord ; and when he would be in his greatest suffering he would beg his wife or one of the Sisters to recite for him the " Litany of the Passion," for he said it made him think lightly of his own sufferings, when he compared them with those of our Lord. In particular, he would not let those about him try to assuage the thirst from which he suffered constantly and intensely, but desired to bear it for the sake of our Lord's thirst on the Cross. Did I ever mention to you that my brother Charles lost his eldest child when quite an infant ? This little child was the first Catholic Cliffe to die ; the next was my eldest brother's little girl. She had been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin for three years, and just as those three years were about to expire the little child died. Thus two innocent children were the first to be taken from among us after we became Catholics ! And then next after them followed my dear sister Cecilia. She had always been

an extraordinarily pure and innocent soul, and God took *her* next as being the one, no doubt, best prepared to go. Three years after she had joined the Order of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul she died, at the age of twenty-nine, a beautiful and happy death, and of which her Sister Superior wrote the following touching account to my father :

Extract from the Sœur Anna's letter.

“I little thought the last time I had the pleasure of seeing you that I should have such sad intelligence in so short a time. I certainly had very little hope she would ever be strong again, but I did not expect her to be taken from us so soon ; however, such was the holy will of God, and I may safely say it was also the will and the wish of our dear and beloved Sister. She had her perfect consciousness up to the last moment, which was at half-past five on Monday evening (July 7th, 1863), and so resigned and so happy was she that she wondered why we should be so fretted ; decidedly it was not so much for *her* sake as for *ourselves* that we regret her, for I am sure she is in the enjoyment of eternal bliss ; but she was for us such a holy example and such an amiable companion that we deeply deplore her loss. She lived amongst us as a model of virtue, and died as she had lived. Our Sisters in the Rue du Bac have written to say that they envy me my happiness in seeing her death. You can have but a faint idea of the dispositions of this innocent and beautiful soul, and of her desire to enjoy her God ; and this desire she expressed by constant ejaculatory prayers to go and enjoy God,

her Spouse, for all eternity. When she saw it was coming to an end, she said, 'all was finished,' and recommended me to let you know she was most happy and contented to leave this world, and that in Heaven she would intercede for you. She has early won the crown for which others have to struggle longer."

Three years more and my brother Charles was gone. This year, 1868, the *last* Protestant of the family, Edward, entered the Church; and he has shown himself, since his conversion, an example of faith and devotion, and enjoys, as he says himself, a peace he never knew before. His conversion was brought about in a truly wonderful manner. Up to the year 1866 he was still in the army, and as long as he remained so we could see no hope of his turning his thoughts to the Catholic religion. But a severe accident he met with during an election riot in Waterford, when his company was called out, resulting in serious injury to his eye, obliged him to quit the service and return home. For some time after this he seemed more strongly than ever opposed to Catholicity; but the work of God's grace was slowly going on within him, unknown to us and perhaps to himself. Some six months before his conversion he went to London, to stay there quiet by himself, apart from all his family, in order, as he afterwards said, that he might privately work out the subject for himself, so that it could not be said that it was merely *his family* who had influenced him. He was received in the Church of the Oratory, Brompton, and a few days after confirmed by Dr. Manning, who chiefly ascribed

his conversion to the prayers of my dear sister Cecilia.

It is a singular fact regarding our family that nothing of any kind occurred to us as long as we remained Protestants. Some of us might have died in that belief, or married Protestants, and so have lost the chance of becoming Catholics. God kept us all as we were till after our conversion, when most of us settled in life, some entering religion, others marrying, and two have died. Ours has, indeed, been a blest family ; the graces that have been lavished upon us have been something very extraordinary.

I have now given some account of our conversion. It has been a great pleasure to me to write it, and to recall to my mind that happy time twelve years ago.

November, 1879.

Twenty-three years have now passed away since the happy event of the conversion of my family took place as related above, and eleven years since I first wrote that account.

Within those eleven years three more of our number have gone to their rest ; my dear sister Frances first. She had entered the Order of Sisters of Charity a very few months after her conversion ; a year afterwards she was sent out to Smyrna, from which she never returned, but died there a holy and happy death. Then followed, some years after, my mother, and last year my dear father. All have died true and sincere children of our dear and holy Faith.

Thanks be to our dear Lord for all His mercies !

JANE E. REDINGTON ROCHE.

X.—EVENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE, 1856-57.

I HAVE already explained that the Collegio Pio, founded by Pius IX., was not intended exclusively for English converts preparing for the priesthood, but also for others who, though always Catholics, at a later period of their lives felt that they were called by God to embrace that holy state. Later on it was thought advisable to admit a few who had been priests for some years, and wished to go through a course of Canon law to qualify themselves as professors in the colleges in England, or to fill the higher offices of the Church.

Among these was the Hon. and Rev. William Clifford, whose father, Lord Clifford, spent most of every year in Rome and was well known to all of us. It is hardly necessary to mention that they belonged to one of the few noble families who had kept the Faith during the centuries of persecution. A vacancy occurring in the Diocese of Clifton, Dr. Clifford was chosen by the Holy Father to fill the vacant see, and his Holiness announced his intention of performing the sacred ceremony himself. This was indeed an extraordinary favour, and intended to show his appreciation of the fidelity of the family to the ancient Faith.

Crowds of people were attracted to the Sistine Chapel, to assist at the solemnity. It was an event once seen could never be forgotten. At the conclusion of the ceremony the newly consecrated Bishop, attended by his Consecrator, walked round the church giving his episcopal blessing to all the people. In this particular case no change was made. The Pope walked by the side of the new Bishop, holding his cope like an ordinary server ; nothing on his head but the little *zucchetto* or skull cap. The Bishop, wearing his mitre for the first time, gave his blessing to the assembled multitude, and afterwards sat in the episcopal chair, his great Consecrator standing by his side. This was a compliment to the English nation which was appreciated by most sensible people.

The following morning the Bishop performed his first episcopal act in our College by ordaining me a subdeacon. At the same time the Rev. Thomas Drinkwater was ordained a priest.

I continued to keep up a correspondence with my convert friends in Paris. It afforded me great gratification to find that their conversion was in no way superficial, but rested on a solid and practical conviction, which altered the whole course of their lives and made their influence felt by many of their relations and friends. In further proof of this I must add one or two more

letters, which will speak for themselves and are much too good to pass into oblivion.

The first was written by the eldest daughter of the Cliffe family, who was for a long time opposed to the Catholic movement among her relatives ; but grace at length prevailed. Her letter to me shows the strength of her character :

38, Avenue Gabriel,
December 18th, 1856.

My dear Mr. Kirk,—I cannot tell you how obliged I am to you for “the lecture” you so kindly gave me in your most welcome letter, and which I intend to follow out strictly, except in one thing : I hope you will excuse me not following your advice about asking Père de Ravignan what course of reading I ought to pursue. I do not say this out of a spirit of perversity, but at present I am engaged with Waterworth, which I do not wish to interrupt. Your advice, however, about the “Lives of the Saints” and the “Imitation of Christ” I shall follow, and thank you most earnestly for it.

I feel at present very shy with Père de Ravignan, and never speak to him but in the confessional. I have no opportunity, and must confess never seek it. I have never opened my heart to *any one* : so you may conceive how difficult it would be to a French priest. I shall now, however, consider it doubly my duty to shake off my indifference, as I feel bound to follow every advice you give me, and also on account of my name being that of our Lady and her mother, St. Anne.

I certainly do feel more pleasure in reading the Holy Scriptures now than I used to do. Not content with passing over a mystified passage, I used to put my own foolish interpretation on it. Madame Davidoff and I have had a great battle about my giving up my Bible, and indeed any Protestant book in my possession ; but I steadily refused her and came off victorious. Was I right? Mrs. Ram says I was. I have, however, a Catholic Testament.

I am very glad now I wrote the egotistical letter I did—which, after I had sent it, I wished many times I could have recalled—since it has drawn from you a lecture touching on most of my weak points : a lecture which I shall ever bear in grateful remembrance on my heart, and adds to the immense debt of gratitude I owe you.

Papa wrote to my cousin the other day to ask him if the report of his conversion were true, and received for answer that it was not. I am very sorry for this : he is a Catholic at heart. He says : “The new dogma of the Immaculate Conception and some miracles which he witnessed at Naples some years ago are insuperable objections to his entering the Catholic Church” ; but I strongly suspect his wife and mother are much more “insuperable objections” than either the Immaculate Conception or St. Januarius.

I received a letter from Shap Carew this morning, in which he sent me a slip of paper apart from his letter, which I now enclose to you, and I would be greatly obliged if you would send me at your earliest convenience an

answer about "the black marble image, originally the statue of Jupiter Tonans." You can explain these things and I cannot. I shall not write to him till I get your answer. Is it not peculiar his going on to say : "I may possibly see sufficient cause to change my present faith"—he is full of inconsistencies up and down.

We gave him your address the evening before he left Paris for Rome. I do hope he will call on you. I think you will like him ; for when he chooses he can make himself very agreeable, though he has a sneering turn of mind ; but he also has a kind, good disposition, and is very honest and sincere. I am sure he will like you, for he likes the society of well-informed people. Do not return the scrap of paper I send you—please burn it. You will pray for Shap, will you not ? for he sadly needs your prayers ; and pray for me too. And with renewed thanks for all the kindness you have shown me, and for the trouble you took in writing me that useful lecture,

I remain, dear Mr. Kirk,

Yours most sincerely,

MARIANNE CLIFFE.

I have no remembrance of the scrap of paper alluded to : no doubt I did burn it. Shap Carew, in whom the writer was so deeply interested, was the Hon. Shapland Carew, first cousin to the family ; his mother, Lady Carew, being sister to Mr. Cliffe. The name of their place was Castle Boro, not many miles from Bellevue. I had

no opportunity of explaining his difficulties as he left Rome without honouring me with a visit. It may be worth while here, for the sake of some of my readers, to explain the real facts connected with the history of the well-known statue of St. Peter, which was such a stumbling-block to him and to a great many others.

From the time of the so-called Reformation it has been sedulously circulated that the statue of St. Peter in his glorious church in Rome was originally a statue of Jupiter, taken from one of the ancient heathen temples, and re-erected in the great Basilica with only a change of name from Jupiter to Peter. The objector in this case calls it a black marble statue ; in fact, there is not a scrap of any kind of marble in its composition ; it is made entirely of bronze, the material of which was taken centuries ago from the bronze ornaments of the Pantheon. Records prove this beyond doubt. The seated figure blackened during long years has certainly a grim appearance ; the right foot, extended somewhat beyond the pedestal, has been almost worn away by the devout kisses of his loving subjects coming from all parts of the world. In late years copies have been made of different materials, the full size of the original, one of which may be found in our own Church of St. Mary of the Angels, Bayswater, as in nearly all the larger churches in England

and Ireland, and, no doubt, in all other countries.

The following letter from Mrs. Ram belongs to this time :

9, Rue Jean Goujon, Paris,

February 6th, 1857.

My dear Mr. Kirk,—I have been intending to write to you for many weeks, but I have been one day ill, and the next better, and then ill again, which has militated against many of my good intentions. But I will cut short excuses, and pass at once to something more interesting than my health, only observing by the way that I seem to have special strength given me for spiritual pleasures and none for worldly calls (amusements I cannot call them). As you know, those sort of things never did amuse me ; but I should like, on Mr. Ram's account, to do a great deal I cannot do.

First, then, I must tell you how very much I agreed in the *ensemble* of your letter to him about the boys. We have, I think, acted on it as far as possible. Jem has gone to prepare for his commission, and poor dear Abel has gone to Ushaw. We have had some little difficulties to surmount, but the superiors have kindly allowed us to make some private arrangements. I doubt not with you that, on the whole, his stay there will be highly beneficial to him. I think he takes these little mortifications in a good spirit. He seems highly delighted with a letter you have written to him ; he keeps the contents quite to himself, but I well know the nature of your secrets with him, and I thank

you now for all the good and holy influence you have exercised over my children. I am sure you will ever continue to make use of the great influence you have over them all to bring them yet nearer to the beloved Master we all love to serve. I need hardly tell you how grateful I am for such efforts ; yet I do not thank you as a stranger, for we all think of you as one of ourselves—half son, half brother, and soon to be our Father in Christ. None of us, I am sure, can be more attached to you than Mr. Ram, who says you do not write half often enough ; but I dare say you are very busy. Edmund is the only boy left at home now except Arty. I have got an old Catholic governess to come regularly every day for two or three hours to instruct him in the rudiments he is so very deficient in ; I think this will fit him to go to a tutor in a few months. The lessons are done in my boudoir, so that I can see that he is there regularly. All your Cliffe friends are going on well ; we see a great deal of them.

Now I must tell you a little about myself. I made my long wished for retreat. When I found that Mr. Ram was to be detained another week in England, I set off at an hour's notice to Conflans, where I spent a week quite alone, without even my maid. I was up every morning at 5.30, and in chapel before seven. I had five hours' meditation a day, and the "Exercises" of St. Ignatius, in the regular appointed way for ladies, without leaving my room. I was free to walk in the gardens, which were full of Calvaries and Madonnas, but I spoke to no one except for about an hour

in the day. It had never happened to me in my life before to have a week in which to think of nothing but myself. I had heard much of the "Exercises," and they passed my expectation; practical as they are they must arouse every spark of love, generosity, poetry, or chivalry in one's nature. I came out like a giant refreshed in mind and body. I fairly cried (in private) when I had to come away. I am determined to make such a retreat every year, if possible; for the advantage to one's soul is *very great*.

I have been very busy in my mind now for the last three months, looking for a *Third Order* that I might join. You know the Jesuits would never have a Third Order, and do not wish to encourage the idea; indeed, I think that they discourage anything of the kind. I went to see a meeting of the Third Order of St. Francis, the rule of which is perfect; but its members here are entirely of that class to whom one could not easily be useful, and with whom there could be no association. I am told it is being revived in London; if so, I am sure such a thing would be a great boon to many convert ladies who want a nucleus to rally round. The taking part in the Office of the Church, the rule, and the habit, even, of a true child of the Church, has great charms to me; and I would bind myself by every possible link to the beloved yoke that I have had so much trouble to get into. Then I think I should be easier, when I had done all that I could do in my position as the mother of a family. Then, all these children, just going into the world—I would fain, when I present

them before the Lord, not find that I have been wanting in the measure of prayer or penance that I might have offered for them, or for the many who have gone before, and the many who live on yet without the fold and who are so much more worthy of belonging to it than I.

Do inquire for me in what sort of estimation this and the Third Order of St. Dominic are held in in Rome, and write to me what you think, and pray about it for me.

You know my beloved St. Catherine of Siena belongs to the Third Order of St. Dominic. I feel rather abroad about it, because Père de Ravignan told me that I had better apply for light about it *à ceux qui ont les lumières pour cela*. I must say that I feel great need of a rule, and I don't find that a rule of my own making answers the same purpose at all. In the first place, a self-made rule can never be binding ; and then you lose all the benefits of community of prayer ; all which one who has not always been in the Church knows how to value. You may say that you have this in a confraternity ; but then you have not the rule. In these Orders you are, in the eyes of the Church, a Religious – with a rule, a year's novitiate, a habit which is blessed and indulgenced, in which you may be buried ; you take solemn promises and may make *private* vows. I shall have tired you with this, but do think about it a little for me.

Now pray write soon and tell us of yourself. I fancy you are now in retreat. I trust you will soon receive full Orders. I long for you to be in the priesthood. I am sure you will be so

useful, and do pray that to His many other undeserved mercies towards me the Lord will add the vocation of one of my sons to stand before Him in the Temple.

Hoping to hear from you soon, believe me,
Yours most truly,

MARY C. RAM.

XI.—A PRIEST FOR EVER. RETURN TO ENGLAND.

THE ordinary Roman colleges inhabited by aspirants to the priesthood were not always *teaching* colleges. English, Scotch, and Irish, as well as those of other nationalities, lived under the rule of their respective Rectors, who were responsible for their due application to their studies, but were not in any way professors. The two great teaching colleges were the Collegio Romano and the Propaganda. At the former of these all the English students of both houses were obliged to attend. The Professors were all members of the Society of Jesus, and men of eminent abilities; the language used by all was necessarily Latin, as it is the universal language of the Church; no one went there to learn the language—they must know it at least sufficiently well to study their theology and to understand the lecturers, who often spoke with great rapidity and eloquence. This was all easy

enough to Italians, as it was the mother tongue of their ancestors ; but it required some time and strict attention for foreigners of every nation to take in all that was said. It was a nervous piece of business if the Professor called upon one to explain what he had heard, or to answer a difficult question.

Sometimes two were called upon to take different sides on some disputed point. This required fixed attention from all, so there was no chance of going to sleep, as some might have done if they had had only to sit and listen to a drowsy lecture. The German students were by common consent considered the best prepared for this wordy warfare. At noon all returned to their respective colleges for dinner, after which followed a siesta, a really necessary portion of the day's duty : rest for body and mind was essential, especially in the very hot weather. Then off again to the Collegio for another lecture, not from the same Professor, as there was a separate one for Dogmatic and Moral Theology, also for Philosophy.

But there was a still more severe trial to the nerves which must be undergone before receiving any Holy Order. Each candidate had to stand alone at the end of a very long table ; at the other end, directly opposite, sat the Cardinal Vicar, and on each side a long line of heads of Religious Orders

and other theologians. His Eminence would then point to any one of them, which was a sign that he was to undertake the examination of the poor fellow at the end. One grace was granted to him, that he could choose any theological treatises which he had studied. My examiner was a good way from me and I could only hear with difficulty; but one who was near me kindly repeated the question, which made it much more easy. At all events I was passed. I thought at the time that if I had been an examiner I would not have passed myself.

A year is supposed to elapse before you can receive any higher Order; but my time was shortened at the request of Dr. Manning, who wished to have me with him in London as he was engaged in forming his community of the Oblates of St. Charles. I owed him so deep a debt of gratitude I could only wish to do whatever he desired.

After the necessary eight days' retreat, I received the holy Order of deacon at the Church of St. John Lateran, at the hands of Cardinal Patrizi, on the 19th of December, 1857. About seventy others were ordained to different Orders at the same time, representing nearly every nation and tongue. What religious body outside the Catholic Church could produce such manifest evidence of the perpetual presence of

the Holy Ghost and His Pentecostal gifts? One Faith, many tongues. In separation from the One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church what remains but a Babel of confusion?

Six months after this event I was again permitted to anticipate the ordinary interval of a year, and received the crowning grace of the priesthood, together with a few other candidates, at the hands of the Archbishop Vicegerent of Rome, in his private chapel, on the 27th of June, 1858.

Usually every newly ordained priest celebrates his first Mass on the day following his ordination; but I preferred to wait for the following day, the 29th, on account of its being the feast of the Holy Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. I had, therefore, the great privilege of offering the Holy Sacrifice for the first time not only on the feast day, but in the great Basilica dedicated to St. Peter, and at the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. It was one of the few days in the year that the Holy Father celebrated at the high altar, and it was my particular wish to commence my Mass at the same moment with his.

At the moment of consecration the soft melodious harmony of the silver trumpets was heard from the gallery of the mighty dome. It seemed as if Heaven had opened its gates and angelic choirs had issued forth to join with men in adoration of the

ineffable mystery that had taken place on the altar, and to carry back to their celestial abode the incense of prayer and praise which poor imperfect mortals desired to offer to their Heavenly King. O memorable day of grace, mercy, and love, never to be forgotten throughout endless ages !

During the short interval between my ordination and my return to England I had the happiness of offering my daily Mass at some of the principal shrines, my chief intention being for the Conversion of England to the Catholic Faith, and for myself strength and courage to carry out the solemn engagements which were imposed upon me.

Nearly all the time of my preparation for the priesthood in Rome Dr. Manning was actively engaged in London, forming the community of the Oblates of St. Charles Borromeo, similar to the one founded by the Saint when Cardinal Archbishop of Milan. The great object which St. Charles had in view was to establish a body of priests living together under rule, not all of them engaged in parish work, but ready at any time to assist their bishop in any diocesan work which the parochial clergy were unable to undertake. This was particularly needed in London, where the number of priests was small compared with the ever increasing number of their flocks, occasioned not only by conversions to the

Faith, but by the large influx of emigrant Catholics from Ireland. It was at the urgent request of Cardinal Wiseman that Dr. Manning undertook this great work. His own wish and intention was to build a church and house at Westminster. He had already commenced the work by purchasing several small houses in Palace Street, not far from Buckingham Palace. Several of the houses had been taken down and preparations had been made for the building of the new church, which was to be dedicated to St. Peter and St. Edward. He could not, however, resist the desire of the Cardinal to take possession of an unfinished church at Bayswater, which had remained roofless for some years, as means were not forthcoming to finish it. It was characteristic of the man never to relinquish what he had begun, and so he obtained permission of the Cardinal to retain and carry out his original intention of founding a church and schools at Westminster as well as the larger and more important work at Bayswater. The only change was that the Church of St. Peter and St. Edward was erected on a smaller scale than was originally intended. I have reason to know it and love it, as I had charge of it for many years. Now, in these latter days in which I write, the dear church and artistic little house are doomed to destruction, as the new Cathedral in the immediate neighbour-

hood already sheds its shadow over it and renders its removal a necessity. I am, however, running on very far ahead and must return.

The new church at Bayswater was dedicated under the title of St. Mary of the Angels, after the great Franciscan Basilica at Assisi, known throughout the world as the cradle of the Franciscan Order. Dr. Manning was himself a tertiary of the Order, not only in name, but in true spirit and uniform practice. For him, as for his holy patron, nothing was too good to give to God ; anything was good enough for himself. By word and example he endeavoured to infuse the same spirit not only into his associate priests, but also among all his parishioners, by establishing the Third Order of St. Francis, which furnished them with a regular rule of life adapted to all classes of society, from kings to beggars. In after life, as Archbishop and Cardinal, no change was made in his abstemious mode of living, though he strictly carried out all that was necessary to support the dignity of his office. One of the first members of the community was the Rev. Herbert Vaughan, scion of an ancient family ever loyal to the old Faith, in after years consecrated as the Bishop of Salford, 1872, finally appointed Archbishop of Westminster in succession to Cardinal Manning, in 1892, and shortly afterwards

created Cardinal. Our young community was highly honoured by the selection from our ranks of two such illustrious prelates.

While making preparations for my departure from Rome I collected several relics from holy shrines, and all kinds of faculties for admitting people to pious confraternities with indulgences attached, all of which have proved of great service among our parishioners.

All my good friends and converts, especially the Ram and Cliffe families, had by this time left Paris, and after some delay in London had returned to their respective homes in Wexford. I therefore had no one in Paris to welcome me except our mutual friend, Madame Davidoff, at the Convent of the Sacré Cœur, who gave me a great deal of interesting information respecting her more recent converts.

Early in the month of August I arrived in London, and drove at once to the newly erected community house at Bayswater. The church was only lately roofed, and in no way finished ; however, it was possible to make use of it. A week previous to my arrival Cardinal Wiseman performed the opening ceremony with great solemnity. The few Oblate priests had just taken possession of the newly built Presbytery, which towered high over its neighbours. I was a welcome addition to their number. The *Illustrated London News* of the follow-

ing week produced an admirable illustration of the opening ceremony ; altogether it caused a considerable excitement in the neighbourhood, but no hostile commotion of any kind. A large district was assigned to us, reaching from the Marble Arch to Harrow, a great portion of which was open country with few inhabitants. In process of time London has grown and spread itself over nearly all that space, necessitating a division of our territory into several parishes. In the portion remaining to us, our community has been obliged to build two extra parish churches—one at Notting Hill, the other at Kensal—with the additional outlay on corresponding schools, the erection and support of which has been a heavy burthen. St. Charles' College, for boarders and day boys of good families, is an imposing building standing in its own grounds of more than six acres. Speculating builders have erected handsome houses around, and have asked permission to call it St. Charles' Square. Besides, large convents have been erected of many Orders, contemplative and active : Poor Clares, Carmelites, Daughters of Sion for high-class education, Dominicanesses, Little Sisters of the Poor, Bon Secours for nursing the sick, Little Sisters of the Assumption, Sisters of Mercy, and French Sisters of Charity at Westminster. None of these great works

were even in embryo at the time of my arrival: they were the gradual growth of many years, urged on by necessity and zeal for souls. The Poor Clares were the first to settle in our neighbourhood, and Dr. Manning attributed the success of all his undertakings chiefly to their prayers and penances.

What they were in those early days, they, or rather their successors, continue to be at the present time.

XII.—VISIT TO IRELAND.

THE conversion of two of the leading families of the county naturally caused much commotion among the Protestant community. There was a general opinion that they would not return for a long time to their own homes. They arrived, however, when it suited themselves, and quietly resumed their ordinary mode of life. Ramsfort Chapel did not require much change to suit it for Catholic worship; only the altar was changed from wood to stone. After a time permission was given by the Bishop to celebrate Holy Mass; later still the great privilege of having the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle. All these matters were arranged about the time I reached London. I could not well disappoint the family by declining

their earnest desire to pay them a visit under such happily altered circumstances, and I easily obtained permission from Dr. Manning to do so. Though pleased at the prospect in one way, I knew that in some respects it would be a painful ordeal for myself to meet so many old friends and parishioners to whom I had been much attached, who must, I thought, have entertained bitter feelings towards me for my desertion of them. I should have been ashamed of myself if I had given way to such moral cowardice, and still more ashamed to stand before God in judgment if I failed to bear witness to the truth.

Among those who were good enough to call and see me was the Rev. Father Lambert, head curate of the parish. He was in every way a very remarkable man ; his influence among his parishioners was irresistible. He had a summary way of putting an end to incipient disorders. In one particular case, hearing that some men were taking too much drink and beginning to be disorderly in a public-house, he suddenly appeared among them, and deeming force on such an occasion to be better than persuasion, without saying a word he put his arm on the table and swept all the liquor and glasses on to the floor and walked out of the room, leaving them to pay the cost. On another occasion it was reported to him that a girl of doubtful

character had come to lodge in the town : he cut her hair and sent her along the road.

It was this redoubtable priest who came to welcome me to Gorey, and coolly informed me that I would not be allowed to leave it until I had preached a sermon on Sunday at the last Mass in the parish church. Of course excuses and protests were of no avail : I was obliged to give way. He little knew what disturbance of mind that promise occasioned me. I have never even to this day entered a pulpit or addressed a meeting without undergoing a painful attack of the nerves ; what then would be my state of mind on such an occasion as this—when I should be obliged to talk about myself, with the certainty of my words being reported over all that part of the country ? I depended more on prayer than on my preparation, as I saw plainly that it was the will of God that I should undertake this painful duty.

On the Sunday morning I said my Mass in the Ramsfort Chapel. An arrangement was made that Mr. Ram and myself, together with Edmund and Abel, should drive in an open carriage to the church. During the drive along the avenue I perceived that the two boys had a secret between them, evidently relating to myself, which I could not persuade them to divulge. They would only say : “ Oh, you will see what it is presently.” No sooner did we

pass the park gates than I discovered the nature of the secret. A full brass band awaited us. They formed in front of the carriage, marching slowly, playing their noisy music all the way through the town to the doors of the church. Those moments were to me the most painful of my life. I felt that I should be glad if the earth opened and hid me from my surroundings; besides feeling certain that so much agitation would cause complete forgetfulness of all I intended to say, especially as I had no written notes which I could refer to.

All the roads approaching the church were filled with vehicles of every description conveying crowds of people from all parts of the country. In the interior all seats were removed from the nave in order to provide standing room for a greater number. It was indeed a wonderful sight as I looked down from the pulpit, but the effect produced on my mind was quite different from what I expected and feared. By the goodness of God all nervous agitation disappeared; I felt that it was God Himself who had placed me in that position, and that He was near at hand to help me.

I have no record whatever of the sermon. I only remember that several priests who had been present met me afterwards and assured me that what I said was appreciated, not only by their own people, but by many Protestants who were present,

who perhaps thought that I might have used violent words about themselves : nothing could have been further from my mind, I spoke of them openly with affection. The result of which was that several of the young men came in a body to see me the following day. My stay in the country was too short to carry on any regular instruction, but it was some gain to have established a mutual good will.

My visit to the nuns at Loreto Abbey was no doubt a pleasure to them, as they had all joined in praying for my conversion ; but the good Rev. Mother Benedicta was not there to welcome me. I believe that what she had commenced on earth she was still carrying on in Heaven : she must have been praying for me during the trial through which I had just passed, and I trust she will continue to do so during the short remainder of my earthly pilgrimage.

I was not, however, destined to remain long in peace ; it could hardly be expected that the Protestant clergy would take no notice of the events that were taking place. I was soon assailed with challenges from several to meet them in wordy warfare on some public platform ; where, no doubt, all the listeners would be on one side, certainly not on mine. One doughty champion of the lowest form of Protestantism hoped to have an opportunity of crushing me in presence of his followers.

I am sorry not to have preserved his letter, the purport of which may be understood from my reply, a printed copy of which is still in my possession. The subjoined is a reproduction of the original document.

FATHER KIRK'S REPLY TO THE
REV. W. C. MOORE, RECTOR OF
CARNEW.

Ramsfort, Gorey,
August 26th, 1858.

Rev. Sir,—Were you really actuated by the deep conviction you say you have of the “awful position” in which I now am, I should have expected that, according to the laws of Christian charity, as well as the express precept of Holy Scripture, your first move would have been to come and admonish me as a brother. I should have listened very patiently to anything you had to say; and if nothing else came of it, I should at least have had the pleasure of renewing your acquaintance.

But as your invitation comes in the shape of a challenge, you force me to doubt your sincerity; for knowing, as you very well do from long experience, that there was not the slightest chance of its being accepted, your readiness to meet me is much more like an attempt at display than any real zeal in the cause of Truth.

Besides, I cannot but discern the vanity that leads you to suppose that the power of your oratory may prove sufficient to reconcile me

to opinions with which I am already quite as well acquainted as yourself, and which, after patient and painful deliberation, I have formally abjured.

I have no doubt that this refusal on my part will be added to the number of conquests you have achieved over Catholic priests, but of this be assured : there are other reasons besides the dread of your personal prowess, as the great Protestant champion, which induces them to decline all such wordy warfare.

You are very welcome to any number of *such* victories : they do us no injury, and all your efforts will not hinder the spread of Truth.

Hoping you will give this letter the same publicity as your own, and that it may be considered as a reply to any future communications of a similar nature I may be favoured with from yourself or others, I beg to subscribe myself

Your very obedient servant,

FRANCIS J. KIRK.

The Cliffe family at this date had not yet returned to their beautiful place on the river Slaney, so that I had no opportunity of meeting them before my return to London. They must, however, have arrived soon after, as I was in constant correspondence with one or other of the family. Their abode being in a rural district some miles from any town, the Catholic churches in their neighbourhood were all too small for the rustic parishioners. Mr. Cliffe, therefore, resolved to build a

private chapel for his family and household. Mr. Pugin, the great English architect, was engaged to carry out the work, the sanction of the Bishop having been given on condition that it was not in any way to be considered as a parish church. The result was a very beautiful little stone building worthy of the fame of the architect, and connected with the house by a cloister. The local priests could not be at liberty to say Mass there every Sunday; this inconvenience was often remedied by some priest or other from England or Ireland being on a visit to the family. For many years I divided my holiday time between Ramsfort and Bellevue. Besides the morning Mass, I gave them an afternoon service with English devotions and a sermon, ending with Benediction, to which the country people were admitted as far as space permitted. It was a pretty sight to see boats up and down the river all converging to the same spot, conveying so many with the same object in view. Hardly any of these good people had ever seen Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. When I asked them how they liked the service, the answer was: "Sure it was the gates of Heaven that was open," or something equivalent. I managed to get a lot of silver candlesticks and vases from the butler; some of the old-fashioned wine coolers, which had not been used for years,

made capital vases for flowers; in fact, everything on the altar was solid silver.

XIII.—NEWSPAPER REPORTS AND CONCLUSION.

A PROTESTANT Wexford newspaper published the following article about this time on the subject of these numerous conversions to the Catholic Faith in the county :

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.

The following paragraphs have been going the rounds of the Press. Our contemporary has learned more than has come to our knowledge, when he states that the lady in question and her daughter have resided in the same parish with Mr. Cliffe in this county :

CONVERSIONS.—The *Cork Constitution*, an ultra-Tory paper, contains the following on the subject of conversions to the Catholic Church : “The *Wexford Independent* has a paragraph of the same character as one which we quoted from it the week before last :

“RUMOURED CONVERSIONS.—We understand that a lady of very high English connection, and married to a landed proprietor of the county Wexford, has, with two of her children, recently entered the Catholic Church, and that a gentleman of distinguished lineage and the inheritor of a large estate in the ‘model county’ is about to follow the example of Mr. Ram and Mr. Cliffe. We suppress names, in accord-

ance with rule, until authorised to publish them.

“There is, we believe, no doubt about the truth of this, though it is perhaps prudent for the present to withhold the names. They are very well known, however, in the county in which our contemporary circulates, and there the ‘conversions’ have been for some time expected. The ‘children’ of the ‘lady of very high English connection’ are daughters, grown up young ladies of great personal attractions and accomplishments, and one of them (if not both) has been in a French convent—that birthplace of many a Protestant perversion—for the purpose of being perfected in educational acquirements. They have been for a couple of years abroad, but reside when in Wexford in the same parish as Mr. Cliffe, whose conformity with his family we referred to this day fortnight. The ‘gentleman of distinguished lineage’ is, we apprehend, a gentleman of *noble* lineage—if not, ‘conversion’ is spreading more widely than we have been apprised of, though for our repeated exhortations to assiduity and vigilance, to soundness of doctrine, to familiarity of intercourse, and to an avoidance of those unsatisfying ceremonials and observances which, where they are earnestly adopted, are almost the sure forerunners of declension from the religion which clergymen of the Church of England are ordained to teach—for our repeated exhortations to those we have had reasons undreamt of by persons who foolishly fancy we have a pleasure in parading facts which, were they wise, they would prize as warnings to be

careful not, through coldness or negligence, to let a soul for which they are answerable slip. They may trust us that there are men in the ministry who are strangely out of place."

These newspaper reports were all founded on facts : but as I was in no way connected with the families alluded to, I need not enter into particulars further than to mention that all of them were also received into the Church in Paris, and by Père de Ravignan.

The list of converts would not be complete without special mention of another noble family which gave three daughters to the Church.

Shelton Abbey, the seat of the Earl of Wicklow, though situated in the county of Wicklow, was not far from the borders of Wexford. One of the daughters, Lady Catherine Howard, had, before these events were taking place, become a Catholic, and was shortly afterwards married to a son of Lord Petre, the head of an English family that never swerved from the ancient Faith. So also had her sister, Lady Anne, who afterwards married Lord Milford, and Lady Frances, who was the wife of the Hon. Colin Lindsay. Both of these ladies were well known to me, as they paid a long visit to Ramsfort in the early days of this history. Mr. Lindsay was decidedly High Church : in the course of conversation he told me

that he had had for some time serious doubts about the English Church, but since the appearance of that notable book by the Rev. Robert Wilberforce, entitled "Principles of Church Authority," he had felt on safe ground and had resolved to remain where he was. He was at one time President of the English Church Union, and was the author of a book entitled "*De Ecclesia et Cathedra.*" Within a very short time after the publication of his famous work Wilberforce himself became a Catholic, and went to Rome with the hope of becoming a priest, but died there before his desire could be accomplished. His conversion was a rude shock to the High Church party, who hung on to him as their sheet-anchor; but happily, after a short time, many had the grace given to them to follow in his footsteps; among the number Mr. Lindsay and his wife and family. Their son is the present Right Rev. Monsignor Lindsay, who is attached to the Papal Court and lives in Rome.

In drawing these reminiscences to a conclusion, it will probably interest my readers to have some further information as to the after life and the death of certain members of the family whose history was in some important respects intermingled with my own.

The eldest son, Stephen James, soon obtained his commission in the Scots

Guards. His first voluntary act after donning his uniform was to take his sword to the Very Rev. Father Gordon, who was at that time Superior of the Oratorians, to be blessed by him. Full of hope for his future life, he little knew how short a time he had to live. The circumstances attending his early death were remarkable, and very consoling to his family. He had arranged to go over to Ireland with some of his brother officers to attend the famous Punchestown Races. The afternoon of that day he met with a slight accident at the Wellington Barracks: standing with a group of his military friends, he received a push from one of them in play, which caused him to lose his footing and fall to the gravel. The fall slightly grazed his cheek; no one thought anything of it, but when at dinner at his father's house his mother observed that his cheek was inflamed and tried to persuade him not to leave home—all in vain. He crossed the Channel that night in company with some others, including his cousin, Lord C—. Arriving in Dublin they put up at their club in Sackville Street. In the morning he was decidedly worse, and continued so during the day.

His cousin, perceiving his dangerous condition, resolved that he should not die without the ministrations of the Catholic religion. Though a Protestant himself, he

performed a praiseworthy action (such as was hardly to have been expected from the son and heir of the Grand Master of Orangemen), by going himself to the Catholic Presbytery in Marlborough Street, and not only asking for a priest, but waiting at the house door until he was ready to accompany him back to the club. While on the way the priest followed the young man without knowing who or what he was, but thought his manner rather strange as every now and then he stopped for a moment to strike his leg, exclaiming, "What would the governor say if he knew that I had gone to fetch a priest!" On their arrival at the club, the priest, who had only recently been ordained and was without much experience, did not realise the dangerous condition of the sufferer, so rather encouraged him to expect a speedy recovery, hoped he would have a good night, and expected to find him better when he should call early in the morning. He was on the point of leaving the room when Stephen called him back, saying in a loud voice, "Father, will you please to hear my confession before you leave this room?" He of course complied with his request, and the confession was properly made; but when the priest arrived in the morning he found the patient delirious and unable to receive Holy Viaticum. Extreme Unction was administered, the last blessing given,

soon after which he passed peaceably away. These details I only learned after several years, when by accident I met the priest who attended him.

The body of the deceased was conveyed to London, and buried in the Catholic Cemetery at Fulham, with full military honours. Father Bowden, of the Oratory, who was formerly a brother officer in the same regiment, stood at the foot of the grave, and by his side another dear friend, whose bright uniform contrasted harmoniously with the black cassock of the priest. Stephen James was twenty-eight years of age at the time of his death, and unmarried.

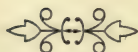
The second son, Edmund, had always been delicate, and died soon after his marriage in 1878. Their mother and my best friend died at Florence in January, 1880. Abel married a lady who became a Catholic before her marriage, and was one with him in all benevolent actions, especially in aiding the Little Sisters of the Poor, devoting the profit of her literary labours to that purpose. They lived chiefly in Paris. He had adopted a daily custom of saying the Rosary at the shrine of Notre Dame des Victoires. One evening in February, 1898, returning to his house, he was seized with a violent internal pain, from which he obtained some relief; but it soon returned and he died within an hour of the attack. They had an only child, a daughter, who is now

a professed nun in the Order of the Sacred Heart.

Arthur, the fourth and only son surviving, was married in February, 1899, at the Oratory, to a lady of high connections and well known in the literary world, who is also a convert to the Faith. The ceremony was performed by the Very Rev. Father Gordon and myself. His aged father insisted on being present. Though he had been confined to his room for a long time previously, he was able to sign his name as a witness, and the following day, with his two younger daughters, he left London for the South of France, in spite of all persuasions to the contrary. It was a terrible journey for these two ladies, who quite expected to see him die in the carriage. Fortunately, they reached their destination, when he was conveyed to bed. Two days afterwards he received the last Sacraments, and died peacefully. His body was conveyed back to England at considerable expense, and afterwards carried to the Oratory Church, where a few weeks previously he had witnessed the marriage of his only surviving son. May he rest in peace!

I have now finished what I had been urged to undertake, and no one can be more conscious of its defects than myself. It is not worthy of any criticism; yet, imperfect as it is, it may in some way be

of use to inquiring souls who, weary of religious discord, are seeking rest. This foretaste of Heaven may be found on earth. The Divine Teacher assures us that this great happiness is within the reach of all: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you."



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